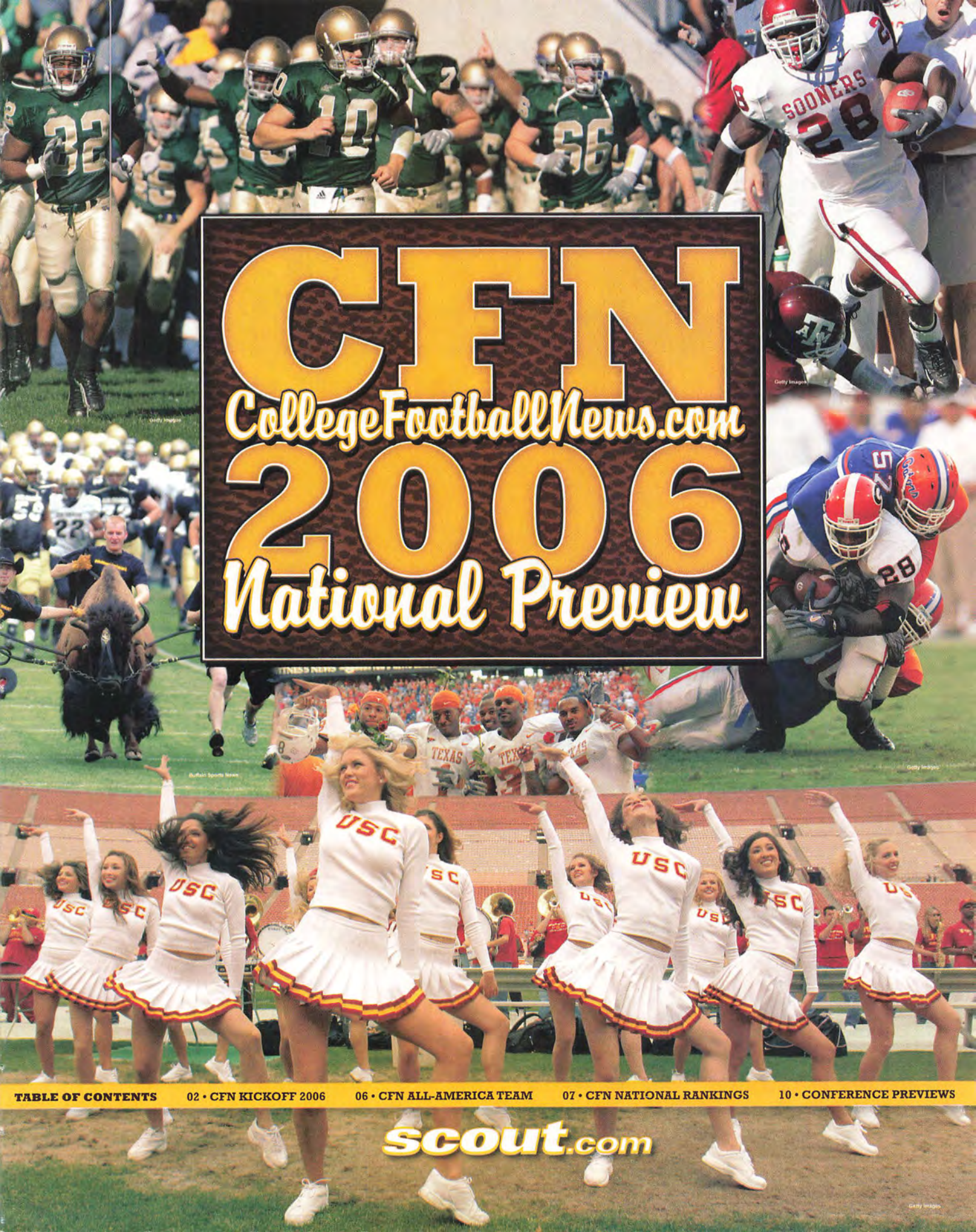

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2006

National Preview

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By Pete Fiutak

COLLEGE FOOTBALL NEWS '06 KICKOFF

How do you top THAT?

If 2005 wasn't the greatest year in college football history, it was a close second to just about any one you could come up with.

There was a great bowl season with four fantastic BCS games, topped off by a national title game that not only lived up to the unattainable hype, it blew past it. There was a resurgence of Notre Dame, Alabama and Penn State, and JoePa and Bobby Bowden squared off in a coaching matchup for the ages. There were all-time great players like Matt Leinart, Reggie Bush and Vince Young playing at a high level all season long. There was Texas-Ohio State and USC-Notre Dame, which each were among the better regular season games of all-time.

Come up with *any* scenario to beat last year. It can't be done because you can't come up with the wire-to-wire momentum started from the moment Leinart said he was coming back for his senior year. 2006 won't be 2005, but ...

The field is wide open

You name the halfway decent BCS league team and it probably has a realistic hope of catching lightning in a bottle and landing in the new BCS Championship Game (more on that later).

Texas has a ten-mile-wide hole to fill at quarterback, Notre Dame needs a defense, and Ohio State, USC, Oklahoma, Florida, Georgia, West Virginia and any other good team you can name has issues, which is a good thing if you're hoping for someone to come up with a 2003 LSU-like out-of-left-field run to a national title. In other words, there doesn't appear to be an absolute killer team, like USC was going into last year.

Get ready for a wild, madcap season with plenty of weeping and gnashing of teeth over the battle for the two spots in the newly created BCS Championship Game.

The new BCS changes

There are three big ones, and they're all positives if you're a fan of the non-BCS league teams, and if you're hoping beyond all reasonable hope for a playoff before your time runs out.

Best Game Ever? Al Bello/Getty

1) Fox is taking over all BCS games other than the Rose Bowl, which ABC will hang on to until 2014.

2) Fox also gets the rights to the fifth BCS bowl game, which will be the national title game played in Arizona this year. The national title game will rotate among the four traditional sites with a second bowl added. For example, the 2010 Rose Bowl will be played like normal, and then there will be a second game for the national championship played later in Pasadena. This extra game isn't a playoff, but it does potentially make for an easy transition to being a playoff game after the bowls. But that's for way down the line.

3) Like before, the champions of the ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 10 and SEC will get an automatic spot in the BCS. Starting this year, one champion from one of the other leagues (Conference USA, MAC, Mountain West, Sun Belt or WAC) will get an automatic spot if it's ranked among the top 12 teams in the final BCS standings *or* is ranked among the top 16 teams in the final BCS standings and ranked higher than the champion of one of the BCS conference champions. That means that TCU would've been in the BCS last year.

Which conference will be the best in 2006?

5. Big 12 — Texas and Oklahoma are loaded, but there's still too much mediocrity. Nebraska is coming off a huge bowl win against Michigan, and Missouri had a nice victory over South Carolina, but is the North really any better? Oklahoma State and Texas A&M should be more competitive. *The best team should be ... Texas*

4. Big Ten — The conference should take a step back this year. Ohio State has reloaded in the defensive back seven, Iowa has a nice team with the sleeper schedule to go on a big run, and Michigan should be better, but Penn State isn't going to be the same without Michael Robinson, Minnesota will take a big step back, and Wisconsin will overachieve before getting blasted by a good team. *The best team should be ... Ohio State*

3. ACC — The ACC was the best from top to bottom over the last few years, but not anymore. Is Miami ready to bounce back, or is it having problems playing in a good conference? Florida State looked great this spring, but is this going to be the year the ship completely turns back around? The rest of the league (cough, Virginia Tech, cough) is way too flaky. While Boston College, Clemson, Maryland, NC State, Georgia Tech, North Carolina and Virginia are all good, are any of them great? Clemson and Georgia Tech might be. *The best team should be ... Florida State*

2. Pac 10 — It's far better than you think. USC might not be the juggernaut of the past few years, but it's not going to fall far. Cal should be incredible, Arizona State's offense will be unstoppable, Washington State should be one of the year's surprise teams, and Oregon and Oregon State should be bowling. Arizona, Washington and Stanford will all be better. *The best team should be ... USC*

1. SEC — Vanderbilt showed last year that it can be competitive, and Mississippi State should have a killer defense. Ole Miss will be better in Ed Orgeron's second year, and Kentucky will be decent, even if the record doesn't show it.

Harry How/Getty

Chris Graythen/Getty

Doug Benc/Getty

Al Bello/Getty

Ultimate Weekly Schedule

Sept. 4 **Florida State at Miami**
The first games start on August 31st, but this possible ACC title showdown officially gets things rolling.

Sept. 9 **Ohio State at Texas**
The winner likely will be ranked No. 1 and have the inside track on the BCS Championship game. ***(also playing: Penn State at Notre Dame)***

Sept. 16 **LSU at Auburn**
Easily the best weekend of the year with Michigan at Notre Dame, Nebraska at USC, Florida at Tennessee, Miami at Louisville and Oklahoma at Oregon.

Sept. 23 **Penn State at Ohio State**
This should be a great rematch of the hardest-hitting game of 2005. ***(also playing: Colorado at Georgia)***

Sept. 30 **Ohio State at Iowa**
The last time these two played in Iowa City, Ohio State lost 33-7.

Oct. 7 **Oklahoma vs. Texas**
Was last year a one-shot deal or can Mack Brown keep Texas one step ahead of the Sooners? ***(also playing: TCU at Utah (Oct. 5), LSU at Florida)***

Oct. 14 **Florida at Auburn**
This likely SEC title preview could also have major national title implications. ***(also playing: Michigan at Penn State, Arizona State at USC)***

Oct 21 **Texas at Nebraska**
If Texas beats Oklahoma, this likely will be the Big 12 Championship preview.

Oct. 28 **Florida vs. Georgia**
The World's Largest Outdoor Gathering That's Not Supposed to be a Cocktail Party.

Nov. 4 **West Virginia at Louisville (Thur. Nov. 2)**
If Louisville beats Miami and West Virginia beats Maryland, this might be for a spot in the national title game. ***(also playing: Virginia Tech at Miami)***

Nov. 11 **Oregon at USC**
If Oregon really wants to be a Pac-10 player, this is the game it needs to have. ***(also playing: Georgia at Auburn)***

Nov. 18 **Michigan at Ohio State**
Take your pick of the big games on Rivalry Weekend. Obviously the Michigan-OSU battle is always big, but California at USC and Auburn at Alabama could be just as important.

Nov. 25 **Notre Dame at USC**
If by some miracle both teams are unbeaten, this might be the most hyped regular season game ever. ***(also playing: Florida at Florida State)***

Everyone else is really, really good. Even though Georgia should take a step back, the league is amazing with Florida, LSU and Auburn as national title contenders and Alabama, Arkansas and South Carolina good enough to beat anyone in the league. Tennessee should come up with the year's biggest turnaround. *The best team should be ... Auburn*

What are the biggest overall changes to the game this year?

Uniform instant replay and a 12-game schedule. All the extra game means is a Cupcake U. or two sprinkled throughout the schedules. The smart big-time teams are using the extra revenue lamb-for-the-slaughter home game to start the year with a tune-up for the important battles ahead. Some are using it as a breather late in the year. On the plus side, the 12-game slate means all the Pac-10 teams play each other, so there'll be a true conference champion, unlike the unfair Big Ten where teams like Purdue don't play Ohio State or Michigan, and without the gimmicky championship money-grubbing games like several other leagues have.

Instant replay will generate the biggest buzz throughout 2006. Outside of the pathologically grouchy who enjoy missed calls and controversy, no one can fault the college version of instant replay when compared to the bizarre and unfair pro version.

Here's the poop. Instant replay will be like normal with a man in a replay booth looking at every play. He'll signal down to the referee when a play should be reviewed upstairs, and everything will function like before. The problem last year was when it took too long for the process to occur and a play couldn't get reviewed in time. That meant coaches had to occasionally burn a timeout just to buy more time, and that, everyone could agree, wasn't fair. To change it, the NCAA has allowed coaches one challenge per game by calling a timeout. If the play isn't overturned, then the team loses a timeout and there aren't any more challenges. Fine.

Here's where it gets tricky. If a play is challenged and gets overturned, the team doesn't lose a timeout and doesn't lose its challenge. Let it ride. Theoretically, a coach can challenge 743 times a game as long as he's always right; however, he can't challenge if he doesn't have any timeouts left. Technically, that's fine since bad calls should get overturned. Now for the real kicker; the coaches will be flying blind. There won't be monitors in the coaches' booth, so unlike the NFL when an assistant upstairs yells at the head coach to challenge a call, a head coach will have to hope that he's right. Expect this to get very, very interesting as the season goes on.

And finally, a rule change that will fly under the radar but will make a big impact involves the kicking game. The height of the kicking tee has been reduced to one inch meaning more big returns and better overall field position for the return teams. Expect this to play a really big role late in games when a team needs to go on a final scoring drive.

Brian Brohm

Andy Lyons/Getty

Everyone will be complaining about...

The BCS. Again. With the new 12-game schedule, and with some playing 13 games thanks to conference championships, it'll be harder and harder for teams to stay healthy through the long season and there are bound to be more slip-ups. No one appears to have a dominant team going into the season, and no one has a sure-thing schedule that assures 12-0. Of course, someone could go unbeaten, but who?

We all got a nice break in 2005 with the cut-and-dried Texas vs. USC national title, but the odds are solid that we'll all have to waste our time comparing apples to oranges, SEC to Pac-10, Big 12 to Big Ten, and/or some other configuration of things before some deserving team is out of the national title game. We're also overdue for a mega-blowup with five deserving one-loss teams jockeying for a spot in the national title game.

Also, get ready for a year of ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-10 and SEC fans banding together to complain about the Big East. West Virginia achieved a major measure of respect with the Sugar Bowl win over Georgia, but there's still a general feeling by SEC fans that the Bulldogs simply took the game too lightly and that the Mountaineers would have never survived an SEC schedule. Just wait until this year.

West Virginia has a three-game season, hosting Maryland before road games later on against Louisville and Pitt. Louisville has a very respectable home game against Miami and a trip to Kansas State, along with a road date with Pitt and the showdown with West Virginia. What happens if Louisville or West Virginia goes 12-0 and, for example, Texas, Ohio State, USC, Florida State and Florida all have one loss? We're talking a hypothetical situation here, but be prepared for a knockdown-dragout conference debate.

Which teams could shake up their conferences?

ACC — North Carolina

If the quarterback situation stabilizes early on and there's a home upset or two over Virginia Tech and Georgia Tech, John Bunting's crew has the talent to be a thorn in the side of the Coastal Division powers.

Big East — Connecticut

Call 2005 a transition season, with an injury to starting QB Matt Bonislawski and preseason problems with the defense keeping the Huskies from getting back to a bowl. That'll change this year, as they could ruin West Virginia's dream season in Storrs on October 20th ina nationally televised game.

Big Ten — Purdue

All together now ... there's no Ohio State or Michigan on the schedule. Again. The Big Ten road games are at Iowa, Northwestern, Michigan State and Illinois. Winning three of four is very doable, while winning all three tough Big Ten home games against Minnesota, Wisconsin and Penn State is possible.

Big 12 — Oklahoma State

Mike Gundy's program is at least a year away from being respectable in the Big 12 South, and more likely two or three after his fantastic 2006 recruiting class has time to mature. Even so, his Cowboys showed some heart last year, beating Texas Tech and scaring Texas for a half. Texas A&M, Nebraska and Oklahoma have to go to Stillwater.

Conference USA — East Carolina

If Skip Holtz's team could've just played a little bit of defense, it would've finished with a winning season. The offense should be one of the best in Conference USA, making up for more defensive deficiencies. It'll all come down to a three-week span against East favorites Southern Miss, UCF and Marshall.

MAC - Ball State

The Cardinals weren't all that bad last year once they got through with their suspensions. QB Joey Lynch might be the MAC's best quarterback.

Mountain West — San Diego State

For what seems like the 39th straight year, San Diego State is supposed to turn a corner. That might actually happen in Chuck Long's first season at the helm, as he gets to take advantage of some great recruiting classes from the past regime and star RB Lynell Hamilton.

Pac 10 — Stanford

Walt Harris had his down moments in his first season on The Farm, highlighted by a loss to UC Davis, but there were good battles in losses to UCLA and Notre Dame along with wins over Washington State, Arizona State and Oregon State. Everyone in the Pac-10 will be taking the

Cardinal lightly, but the Harris offense is good enough to pull off a few shockers.

SEC — Arkansas

With an opening-day game against USC and SEC home dates against Alabama, Tennessee and LSU, Houston Nutt's club shouldmake plenty of noise in the West. The SEC road slate isn't horrible thanks to trips to Vanderbilt and Mississippi State.

Sun Belt — FIU

The Golden Panthers won four of their final five games in 2005 and should be even better this year. Defending Sun Belt champion Arkansas State has to come to Miami, as does UL Monroe and UL Lafayette. FIU's final four games, all against Sun Belt teams, are at home.

WAC — San Jose State

Don't expect miracles in Dick Tomey's second season, but the Spartans should be even more competitive than last year, when they finished the season with a two-game winning streak. 5-5 speedster Yonus Davis is a nice running back to build around.

Players you know who'll go nuclear in 2006

Rhett Bomar, QB Oklahoma

Dogged after struggling early and without Adrian Peterson to count on over a stretch, Bomar got better as the year went on against a nasty schedule. He's a superior all-around talent who should grow into his prep hype this year.

John David Booty, QB USC

Or Mark Sanchez. It was Booty as a 17-year-old true freshman who was supposed to take over for Carson Palmer, and then Matt Leinart turned into a legend. Booty has first-round NFL skills along with the nation's best receiving corps.

Alley Broussard, RB LSU

The star of the LSU backfield late in the 2004 season, Broussard missed all of last year with a knee injury. He had setbacks in spring ball, but he should be the focal point of the tremendous Tiger offense on opening day.

Colt Brennan, QB &
Davone Bess, WR Hawaii

When it comes to Brennan, think Timmy Chang with talent. He threw for 4,301 yards and 35 touchdowns in his first year, along with showing off some good mobility, and now he has a more experienced receiving corps to work with. Head coach June Jones has said Bess, a true sophomore going into this year, is the best receiver he has ever been around. Bess caught 89 passes for 1,124 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Jamaal Charles, RB Texas

Overshadowed by Vince Young last season, Charles should be the star of the nation's top team after an 878-yard, 13 total touchdown season. While all the other great Longhorn backs could dip into the numbers, 1,500 yards and 15 touchdowns won't be out of reach.

Calvin Johnson, WR Georgia Tech

He'll be a top-15 pick in 2007. Johnson finally started to use his size and strength last year, catching 54 passes for 888 yards and six

Marshawn Lynch

Jonathan Ferrey/Getty

touchdowns, and now he should make a huge jump in overall production with QB Reggie Ball experienced enough to be more accurate.

Sam Keller or Rudy Carpenter,
QB Arizona State

Until he got hurt, it could've been argued that Keller was the Pac-10's best quarterback, throwing for 2,165 yards and 20 touchdowns, along with nine interceptions, in just over seven games. Carpenter came in and finished as the nation's most efficient passer, throwing for 2,273 yards with 17 touchdowns and only two interceptions while completing 68% of his passes. If one of the quarterbacks plays the entire year, 4,500 yards and 40 touchdown passes are possible.

Marshawn Lynch, RB California

Dinged up for most of the year, Lynch still finished with 1,246 yards and ten touchdowns, capped off by a 194-yard, three-score day against BYU. Justin Forsett will certainly be a factor in the Cal ground game, but Lynch might pull a J.J. Arrington and hit 2,000 yards if he can stay healthy.

Sidney Rice, WR South Carolina

Rice became unstoppable with six 100-yard days in the final seven games, highlighted by a 12-catch, 191-yard, one touchdown day against Missouri. QB Blake Mitchell will have a year of experience under his belt and will be even better at getting his star target the ball.

Zac Taylor, QB Nebraska

The light bulb went on as last year progressed, and now Taylor should blossom in his second year as the starter. He has good receivers to work with like Nate Swift and Terrence Nunn, so a 3,000-yard, 25-touchdown season has to be expected.

Drew Weatherford, QB Florida State

Did anyone else realize that Weatherford was hung out to dry as a freshman? With no running game, a depleted offensive line and lousy play-calling from the coaching staff, Weatherford still led the 'Noles to the ACC title, throwing for 3,208 yards and 18 touchdowns. If he can cut down on his 18 interceptions and develop more of a rapport with top target Greg Carr, Weatherford should be in the hunt for ACC Player of the Year honors.

The coaches who have to win this year ...

Call it a hot seat, a make-or-break year, or anything else you'd like to, but there might not be a 2007 for these ten coaches if they don't have big seasons. Don't expect too many firings since most of the usual bottom-feeders have made recent coaching changes.

10. Houston Nutt, Arkansas

After eight years at Arkansas, Nutt needs to come up with his first winning season since 2003 or he might not get a chance to let franchise recruit Mitch Mustain turn the program around.

9. Chuck Amato, NC State

Few are able to pull out the job-saving win better than Amato, but he'll have work to do with all the future NFL stars leaving his defense.

8. John Bunting, North Carolina

He has done a tremendous job considering the schedules his team has had to deal with, but there has been only one bowl game in the last four years.

7. Greg Robinson, Syracuse

He has only been there one year, but another season like last year's 1-10 disaster could start talk of a quick hook.

6. Rich Brooks, Kentucky

Yes, he's *still* there. Seven wins over D-I teams in three years appears to be acceptable. The best win during the Brooks regime came against Vanderbilt last year. The other eight wins were against Idaho State and Murray State (both D-I-AAers), Indiana, Ohio, and Mississippi State (who all went 2-10 in 2003), Indiana (3-8 in 2004), Vanderbilt (2-9 in 2004), and Mississippi State (3-8 last year).

5. Fisher DeBerry, Air Force

All the religious and racial controversies would blow over if DeBerry could come up with his first winning season in three years.

4. Dennis Franchione, Texas A&M

Only one winning season in the last three has many Aggie fans still wondering what was so bad about R.C. Slocum.

3. Phillip Fulmer, Tennessee

Not winning the SEC title puts coaches on the hot seat in Knoxville. Going 5-6 makes the buns burn.

2. Lloyd Carr, Michigan

Not being in the national title race since 1997 - bad. Struggling in the non-conference games, especially on the road - really bad. Losing to Ohio State four times in the last five years - nuclear.

1. Larry Coker, Miami

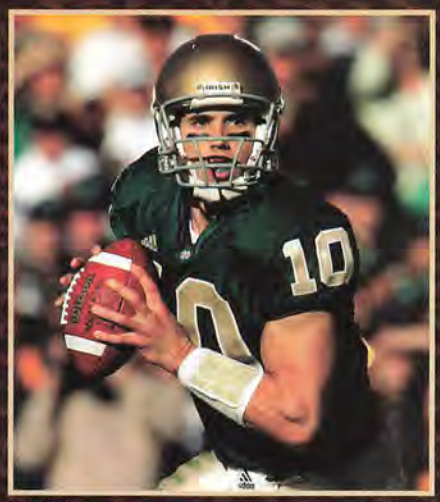
Not playing for national title at Da You is cause enough for putting a coach on the hot seat, but not winning conference titles is cause for a fire alarm. You can only blame the assistant coaches once.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL NEWS

All-Americans

Adrian Peterson

Patrick Willis



Brady Quinn

Gaines Adams

Paul Posluszny

Even with Reggie, Vince, A.J. and Matt gone, there's more than enough star power for a top-to-bottom All-America team that's just as strong as last year ... if everyone is on the field. Dwayne Jarrett needs to be back after getting in trouble with the NCAA and Paul Posluszny, Joe Thomas and Daniel Sepulveda all have to be good as new from knee injuries, but everything is supposed to turn out fine with all of them. The strength is on the defensive front seven with pass rushers galore, while the top position is safety. The weakness is at corner without any worthy of a first-team slot. Looking to get the best players on the field, the lines and secondary are put together regardless of position.

QB Brady Quinn, Sr. ..... Notre Dame
If Quinn can do that after one year under Charlie Weis, year two should be unbelievable.

RB Adrian Peterson, Jr. ..... Oklahoma
The coaching staff isn't going to take it easy on its star. Peterson will run, run, and run some more while getting more work as a receiver.

RB Steve Slaton, Soph. ..... West Virginia
After being one of the shocking new stars of the 2005 season, Slaton should go ballistic running behind a fantastic line.

WR Dwayne Jarrett, Jr. ..... USC
Assuming he's back in the NCAA's good graces and is eligible, Jarrett will be thrown to even more until the new running backs are settled.

WR Sidney Rice, Soph. ..... South Carolina
The big, strong, number one man in the Steve Spurrier offense will explode once he comes back healthy from a thumb injury.

TE Zach Miller, Jr. ..... Arizona State
The NFL scouts can't wait for him to get to the next level. Size, speed, hands, blocking ability, acrobatic catches; Miller does it all.

OL Sam Baker, Sr. ..... USC
The most consistent lineman on some of the greatest offensive machines in college football history will finally get more recognition.

OL Justin Blalock, Sr. ..... Texas
One of the main reasons Vince Young had so many holes to run through could be an All-American at either guard or tackle.

OL Dan Mozes, Sr. ..... West Virginia
He's the perfect leader for a great line as the team's anchor at center.

OL Arron Sears, Sr. ..... Tennessee
Able to shine at tackle or guard, the versatile Sears needs to have a huge season as the only returning starter on the Vol line.

OL Joe Thomas, Sr. ..... Wisconsin
Considered by some to be the best Badger lineman ever, he needs to come back healthy after suffering a torn ACL at the end of 2005.

PK Mason Crosby, Sr. ..... Colorado
Not just a bomber, Crosby is also clutch. New head coach Dan Hawkins has said he'll allow his star to try a 70 yarder.

KR Felix Jones, Soph. ..... Arkansas
Along with being a top speed back in the Hog offense, Jones should shine again after averaging 31.9 yards per return last season.

DL Gaines Adams, Sr. ..... Clemson
With tremendous athleticism, Adams is a perfect fit for Clemson's Bandit position. He's an unstoppable pass rusher.

DL Lawrence Jackson, Jr. ..... USC
A pass rushing terror with the speed of a linebacker in a 6-5, 265-pound frame, Jackson will be one of the Pac 10's most disruptive forces.

DL Brandon Mebane, Sr. ..... California
There might not be a quicker tackle in the country. At 306 pounds and with his speed, he can do it all.

DL Quentin Moses, Sr. ..... Georgia
He might not be huge and he's not always a rock against the run, but there are few better at consistently getting to the quarterback.

LB Rufus Alexander, Sr. ..... Oklahoma
An All-America trash talker as well as a defender, he's a tackling machine with unlimited range.

LB Paul Posluszny, Sr. ..... Penn State
Is he the best linebacker in Penn State's glorious history? He might be if he's back healthy after hurting his knee in the Orange Bowl.

LB Patrick Willis, Sr. ..... Ole Miss
The hidden gem of last year is just now starting to get national respect. There isn't a better tackling linebacker in America.

DB Michael Griffin, Sr. ..... Texas
Michael Huff won the Thorpe Award last year, but Griffin might have had the better year. The former running back has 238 career stops.

DB LaRon Landry, Sr. ..... LSU
A proven playmaker with big-time hitting ability and 4.4 speed, Landry likely would've been a first round draft pick had he come out early.

DB Brandon Merriweather, Sr. ..... Miami
A sure tackler with phenomenal range, he's good enough to be an all-star at either safety spot.

DB Eric Weddle, Sr. ..... Utah
He's a phenomenal all-around athlete who has seen time almost everywhere from safety to cornerback to quarterback to punter to punt returner.

P Daniel Sepulveda, Sr. ..... Baylor
The returning Ray Guy Award winner has to prove he can return healthy after hurting his knee playing basketball.

PR Steve Breaston, Sr. ..... Michigan
Can he stay healthy? He also deserves All-America consideration as a kickoff returner.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL NEWS

The Rankings

Cedric Griffin #8, Tyrell Gatewood #1, Michael Huff #7, Aaron Ross #31, and Billy Pittman #5 Ronald Martinez/Getty

Dwayne Jarrett Harry How/Getty

Schedules, schedules, schedules. It's a hard concept for many pollsters to grasp, but a great record doesn't always mean a team is great. Sometimes a team has back-to-back tough games and should hit a wall, some big conference teams miss playing some of the big boys, and some might have cream-puff non-conference schedules. Most teams would have a losing season with Florida's schedule, while most top 25 teams would easily have a ten-win season with Boise State's slate. Arizona might be a better team than Oregon State and still end up with a far worse record. That's why these rankings are based on how good the teams are going into the season and not necessarily how they'll end up. The projected records don't take into account potential conference title games.

1 USC (projected record: 11-1)

3 Biggest Games: 11/25 Notre Dame, 11/18 California, Oct. 14 Ariz. St.
This isn't going to be the juggernaut of past seasons, but it's loaded with enough talent to play for another title.

2 Texas 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 9/9 Ohio State, 10/7 Oklahoma, 10/21 at Nebraska
If the new quarterbacks are merely competent, a repeat trip to the national title game is more than possible.

3 Ohio State 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 9/9 at Texas, 11/18 Michigan, 9/30 at Iowa
Don't worry about all the lost defensive stars; OSU reloaded. Troy Smith is in for a Vince Young-type season.

4 Oklahoma 11-1

3 Biggest Games: 10/7 Texas, 9/16 at Oregon, 11/4 at Texas A&M
The national title is possible if Rhett Bomar can be consistent and Adrian Peterson doesn't run out of gas.

5 Miami 11-1

3 Biggest Games: 9/4 Florida St., 9/16 at Louisville, 11/4 Virginia Tech
Is this the best Miami defensive back seven ever? The offense might only have to come up with 17 points to win.

6 Auburn 11-1

3 Biggest Games: 9/16 LSU, 10/16 Florida, 11/18 at Alabama
The toughest games are at home until the finale against Bama. Everything should click on offense like 2004.

7 LSU 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 9/16 at Auburn, 10/7 at Florida, 11/24 at Arkansas
If the offense is more consistent and the quarterback situation is settled, the Tigers could win another West title.

8 California 9-3

3 Biggest Games: 11/18 at USC, 9/2 at Tennessee, 9/23 Arizona State
This is a much better team that it'll initially get credit for. The RBs and LBs are among the nation's best.

9 Florida 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 9/16 at Tenn., 10/28 Georgia, 11/25 at Florida St.
Urban Meyer will have the Gators in the national title chase ... next year. This year's schedule is too nasty.

10 Tennessee 9-3

3 Biggest Games: 9/16 Florida, 10/7 at Georgia, 11/4 LSU
Last year was a fluke. With a sense of urgency and former offensive coordinator David Cutcliffe returning, look out.

11 Florida State 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 9/4 at Miami, 11/25 Florida, 9/16 Clemson
Is Florida State back to being Florida State? A win in the opener over Miami could mean smooth sailing until Florida.

12 Clemson 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 9/16 at FSU, 10/26 at Virg. Tech, 11/25 S. Carolina
Easily the best team yet in the Tommy Bowden era, this is an ACC title contender if the secondary is consistent.

13 Michigan 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 11/18 at Ohio State, 10/21 Iowa, 10/14 at Penn State
New assistant coaches, a new fire, and a leaner, meaner Wolverine team means more attitude than ever.

14 Louisville 11-1

3 Biggest Games: 11/2 West Virginia, 9/16 Miami, 11/25 at Pitt
There's no stopping the offense with Brian Brohm back from a knee injury and Michael Bush leading a loaded backfield.

15 West Virginia 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 11/2 at Louisville, 11/16 at Pitt, 9/14 Maryland
When Pitt and Maryland are two of your toughest games, you know it might be your year.

16 Virginia Tech 10-2

3 Biggest Games: 11/4 at Miami, 10/26 Clemson, 10/12 at BC
There's enough athleticism to make up for most of the personnel losses, but a steady QB needs to emerge.

17 Nebraska 9-3

3 Biggest Games: 10/21 Texas, 9/16 at USC, 10/7 at Iowa State
The offense knows what it's doing now, but it'll be the defense that carries the program back to among the elite.

18 Notre Dame 8-4

3 Biggest Games: 11/25 at USC, 9/16 Michigan, 9/9 Penn State
It's not like the D got better since the Fiesta Bowl. The schedule is tougher than you think.

19 Georgia 9-3

3 Biggest Games: 10/28 Florida, 10/7 Tennessee, 11/11 at Auburn
The defending SEC champion has holes to fill, but the running backs and overall speed might be enough to repeat.

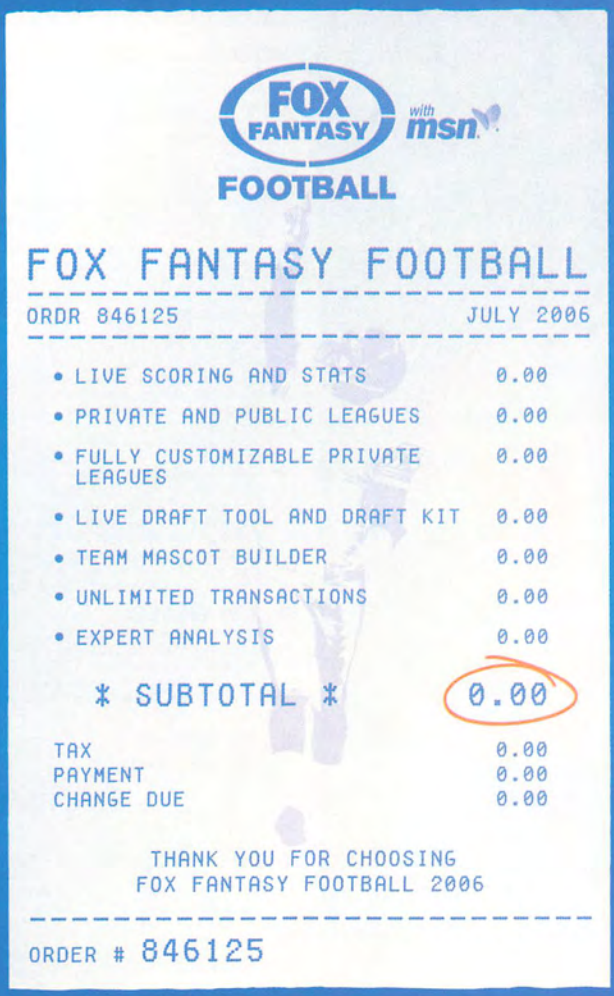
20 Iowa 11-1

3 Biggest Games: 9/30 Ohio State, 10/21 at Michigan, 11/11 Wisconsin
Good team, better schedule. It's all up to a home date with the Buckeyes and a road trip to Ann Arbor.

...the Rest

21	Arizona State 8-4	71	San Diego State 4-8
22	Penn State 9-3	72	East Carolina 6-6
23	Georgia Tech 9-3	73	Kentucky 4-8
24	Alabama 7-5	74	Houston 7-5
25	Missouri 7-5	75	Washington 4-8
26	Colorado 8-4	76	Nevada 8-4
27	Maryland 6-6	77	Illinois 5-7
28	Texas Tech 8-4	78	Stanford 5-7
29	Arkansas 9-3	79	Cincinnati 4-8
30	Wisconsin 9-3	80	Colorado State 5-7
31	TCU 9-3	81	UCF 6-6
32	Boston College 8-4	82	Marshall 5-7
33	Iowa State 7-5	83	Vanderbilt 2-10
34	Michigan State 6-6	84	Navy 7-5
35	Washington State 6-6	85	New Mexico 6-6
36	Oregon 7-5	86	Wyoming 3-9
37	Arizona 5-7	87	Memphis 6-6
38	Boise State 11-1	88	UAB 4-8
39	Utah 11-1	89	Duke 2-10
40	Oregon State 7-6	90	Akron 7-5
41	South Florida 8-4	91	SMU 5-7
42	NC State 6-6	92	Miami University 6-6
43	Pitt 7-5	93	Louisiana Tech 7-6
44	Texas A&M 8-4	94	UNLV 3-9
45	Fresno State 7-5	95	Central Michigan 5-7
46	UCLA 5-7	96	Air Force 4-8
47	Purdue 7-6	97	Western Michigan 5-7
48	Connecticut 6-6	98	Tulane 3-9
49	Minnesota 5-7	99	Bowling Green 7-5
50	BYU 8-4	100	Kent State 2-10
51	Virginia 7-5	101	UL Lafayette 7-5
52	South Carolinia 6-6	102	Ball State 5-7
53	Northwestern 4-8	103	Eastern Michigan 3-9
54	Kansas 6-6	104	Ohio 2-10
55	Kansas State 4-8	105	MTSU 5-7
56	Tulsa 8-4	106	Troy 4-8
57	Ole Miss 6-6	107	Idaho 3-9
58	North Carolina 5-7	108	Arkansas State 4-8
59	Oklahoma State 4-8	109	North Texas 4-8
60	Rutgers 6-6	110	Rice 0-12
61	Southern Miss 7-5	111	Army 4-8
62	Northern Illinois 9-3	112	Utah State 1-11
63	Toledo 8-4	113	Florida International 5-7
64	Wake Forest 4-8	114	San Jose State 2-10
65	Baylor 4-8	115	UL Monroe 2-10
66	UTEP 8-4	116	New Mexico State 3-9
67	Syracuse 3-9	117	Buffalo 2-10
68	Mississippi State 4-8	118	Florida Atlantic 1-11
69	Indiana 4-8	119	Temple 0-12
70	Hawaii 9-4		

Spend your time,
not your money



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NFLPLAYERS

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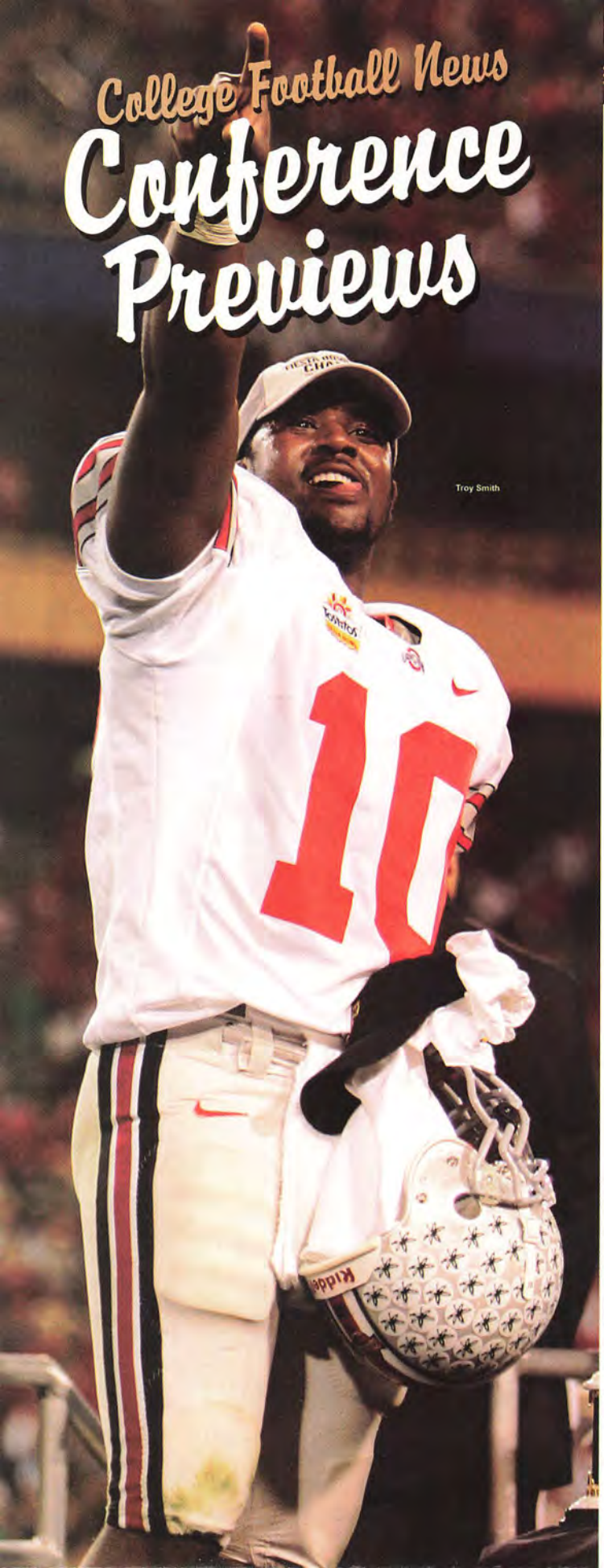
College Football News

Conference Previews



Troy Smith

Drew Weatherford — Doug Benc/Getty

ACC

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

Talk about hitting a home run with expansion. The ACC got its money's worth out of Florida State in 1992, and then made itself a superpower football conference with the addition of Miami, Virginia Tech and Boston College. While it's been a positive move for the league, it's been a nightmare for the old ACC teams that can't seem to get in on the fun, with only Maryland in 2001 breaking up the run by the relative newcomers. The new status quo isn't likely to change. The league should remain as competitive as ever with Duke the only team with no reasonable shot of hanging with the better teams. Clemson is the best it's been under Tommy Bowden, Virginia Tech should be fine once the quarterback situation is settled, and as always, Florida State and Miami will be terrific.

3 THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

1. Florida State QB Drew Weatherford is on the verge of being a major talent. Thrown to the wolves last year, now he knows what he's doing and will put up huge numbers with a speedy, talented receiving corps.
2. Georgia Tech won't be in the national title race, but it'll be a major player. It won road games at Auburn and Miami last season, and this year it'll be good enough to win at least two again Notre Dame, Virginia Tech, Miami, and Georgia.
3. Miami will quickly find itself in the national championship chase if it beats Florida State and Louisville in the first three weeks, but will blow it over the second half of the year with four road games in five. That home game? Virginia Tech.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Florida State at Miami, Sept. 4

A likely preview of the ACC title game, a win for FSU would likely kick-start an 11-0 run going into the Florida showdown. After the way last year ended for the Canes, Larry Coker needs this win.

ALL-ACC OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
Calvin Johnson, WR Georgia Tech

Great college football superstars make things happen no matter what. Johnson might have first-round NFL talent, but he has to show he can be unstoppable and can always get open.

QB	Drew Weatherford, Soph.	Florida State
RB	James Davis, Soph.	Clemson
RB	Micah Andrews, Jr.	Wake Forest
WR	Calvin Johnson, Jr.	Georgia Tech
WR	Chansi Stuckey, Sr.	Clemson
TE	Greg Olsen, Jr.	Miami
OL	Josh Beekman, Sr.	Boston College
OL	Dustin Fry, Sr.	Clemson
OL	Jared Gaither, Soph.	Maryland
OL	Andrew Gardner, Soph.	Georgia Tech
OL	Leroy Harris, Sr.	NC State
PK	Jad Dean, Sr.	Clemson
KR	Darrell Blackman, Jr.	NC State

ALL-ACC DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
Brandon Meriweather, S Miami

He's not huge at 6-0 and 188 pounds, but he's a sure tackler with phenomenal range. He has 202 career tackles and should be one of the nation's top all-around safeties.

DL	Gaines Adams, Sr.	Clemson
DL	Baraka Atkins, Sr.	Miami
DL	Chris Ellis, Jr.	Virginia Tech
DL	Andre Fluellen, Jr.	Florida State
LB	Buster Davis, Sr.	Florida State
LB	Vince Hall, Jr.	Virginia Tech
LB	KaMichael Hall, Sr.	Georgia Tech
DB	Brandon Meriweather, Sr.	Miami
DB	Kenny Phillips, Soph.	Miami
DB	John Talley, Sr.	Duke
DB	Aaron Rouse, Sr.	Virginia Tech
P	Adam Podlesh, Sr.	Maryland
PR	Eddie Royal, Jr.	Virginia Tech

Jeff Gross/Getty

Atlantic Division

T1. Florida State
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: QB Drew Weatherford, Soph.
This season will be a success if... Florida State is playing for the national title. If the 'Noles can win the opener at Miami, the toughest games left are all at home.

T1. Clemson
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: DE Gaines Adams, Sr.
This season will be a success if... Clemson wins the Atlantic Division. The team is too experienced and too talented not to play for the ACC title.

3. Boston College
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: OG Josh Beekman, Sr.
This season will be a success if... BC finishes with another nine-win season. The team isn't as good as last year's version and has brutal luck with the ACC schedule.

4. Maryland
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: RB Josh Allen, Sr.
This season will be a success if... The Terps win eight games and beat at least one really, really good team. They're still about a year away from seriously challenging for the ACC title, so this has to be a positive-step season.

5. NC State
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: C Leroy Harris, Sr.
This season will be a success if... State wins eight games. With a favorable ACC schedule and a light non-conference slate, anything less would be cause for screaming.

6. Wake Forest
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: LB Jon Abbate, Jr.
This season will be a success if... Wake gets to a bowl game. It's hardly a lock with the nasty ACC games to deal with and six reasonably tough road games, but a hot start is likely.

Coastal Division

1. Miami
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: FS Brandon Meriweather, Sr.
This season will be a success if... Miami wins the ACC title game. Goal number one has to be to win the ACC championship. Then the 'Canes can hope everything falls into place for something even bigger.

T2. Virginia Tech
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: LB Vince Hall, Jr.
This season will be a success if... the Hokies go 10-2. Considering how many holes Tech has to patch up, winning double-digit games would be a major success.

T2. Georgia Tech
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: WR Calvin Johnson, Jr.
This season will be a success if... Tech finishes second in the Coastal Division. There are a few too many holes to expect a division title, but there's no reason not to go 6-2 in conference play.

4. Virginia
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: CB Marcus Hamilton, Sr.
This season will be a success if... Virginia wins eight games. If this year's team can better last year's 7-5 mark just by beating the teams it'll be favored against, the excitement will be through the roof for 2007.

5. North Carolina
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: LB Larry Edwards, Sr.
This season will be a success if... UNC gets back to a bowl game. This isn't a good enough team to win the Coastal Division, but there's enough experience to come up with a winning season and get a 13th game.

6. Duke
Predicted record: 2-10 **Conf. record:** 0-8
Best Player: CB John Talley, Sr.
This season will be a success if... The Blue Devils win five games. That might be asking for the world with so many holes, but it's an attainable goal if they pull off home wins against Richmond, Vanderbilt, and Navy.

BIG EAST

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

Will West Virginia and Louisville be worthy of national title talk? Talent-wise, these two will be among the 15 best teams in the country, but they'll be under the microscope all season long. They each have weak league schedules compared to the other BCS conferences, and only one decent non-conference game each (Miami for Louisville, and Maryland for West Virginia). Big East apologists should get some ammo for their arguments as Pitt, Connecticut, Cincinnati and Syracuse should all be better than they were last season, and South Florida and Rutgers could be almost as good as their 2005 bowl-bound teams. Even though the league could use an overall boost in production, it'll make the most noise if the Cardinals and Mountaineers can stay unbeaten until their November 2nd showdown. Needing more chances to prove itself, the Big East needs its superpowers in the BCS.

3 THINGS TO WATCH FOR

1. Linebackers. You don't normally think of big-time defenders when you think of the Big East, but it has some of the nation's best linebackers in Pitt's H.B. Blades and Clint Session, South Florida's Stephen Nicholas and Ben Moffitt, West Virginia's Kevin McLee, Syracuse's Kelvin Smith, and Louisville's Nate Harris.
2. South Florida will start 5-0 in Big East play, and then the roof will cave in with road games at Louisville and West Virginia.
3. Pitt will take another step back to take a huge leap forward with several true freshman seeing major playing time. It might pay off late in the year when this more athletic team will upset either West Virginia or Louisville.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Nov. 2, West Virginia at Louisville

Could this be a battle of two unbeaten teams? The Miami game might set the tone for the Cardinals, but they can't win the Big East title if they don't beat the Mountaineers. West Virginia will be the favorite in every other game.

ALL-BIG EAST OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
QB Brian Brohm, Louisville

The 6-4, 224-pound junior is coming off a torn ACL that cost him the last two games of the season, but that didn't stop him from being the Big East Offensive Player of the Year. Brohm has the arm, the smarts, and the touch to be a next-level star, and now he has to prove he can be the type of quarterback who can carry his team to a conference title. He's not a runner, but he can move a little bit and is able to throw well on the move. The key to his game is accuracy. When he gets into a groove, it's over.

QB	Brian Brohm, Jr.	Louisville
RB	Michael Bush, Sr.	Louisville
RB	Steve Slaton, Soph.	West Virginia
WR	Darius Reynaud, Jr.	West Virginia
WR	Mario Urrutia, Soph.	Louisville
TE	Clark Harris, Sr.	Rutgers
OL	Dan Mozes, Sr.	West Virginia
OL	Kurt Quarterman, Sr.	Louisville
OL	Jeremy Steffey, Sr.	West Virginia
OL	Ryan Stanchek, Soph.	West Virginia
OL	Thed Watson, Sr.	South Florida
PK	Arthur Carmody, Jr.	Louisville
KR	Willie Foster, Sr.	Rutgers

ALL-BIG EAST DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
LB Stephen Nicholas, South Florida

Nicholas has seen time at both outside positions and has been dominant at each spot, with 224 career tackles, with 12.5 sacks and 38.5 tackles for loss. While he's not huge at 6-3 and 226 pounds, he hits like a Mack truck and has phenomenal range. Despite his lack of size, he would've been around an early-round draft pick had he left early.

DL	Zach Anderson, Sr.	Louisville
DL	Rhema Fuller, Sr.	Connecticut
DL	Keilen Dykes, Jr.	West Virginia
DL	Amobe Okoye, Sr.	Louisville
LB	H.B. Blades, Sr.	Pitt
LB	Stephen Nicholas, Sr.	South Florida
LB	Kelvin Smith, Sr.	Syracuse
DB	Tanard Jackson, Sr.	Syracuse
DB	Mike Mickens, Soph.	Cincinnati
DB	Darrelle Revis, Jr.	Pitt
DB	Eric Wicks, Sr.	West Virginia
P	Brendan Carney, Sr.	Syracuse
PR	Darrelle Revis, Sioph.	Pitt

Steve Slaton — Streeter Lecka/Getty

1. Louisville
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 7-0
Best Player: QB Brian Brohm, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Louisville wins the Big East title and goes 11-1. Getting to the BCS is a positive no matter what. Yeah, there might be national title talk early in the season, but that requires as much luck as anything else. Take care of the conference title first, and then hope everything else falls into place.

T2. West Virginia
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 5-2
Best Player: RB Steve Slaton, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... the Mountaineers play for the national title. They'll be favored in every game but one: at Louisville. Good teams dream about having a schedule like the one they have this season.

T2. South Florida
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 5-2
Best Player: LB Stephen Nicholas, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Bulls win nine games. There will be a few disappointments along the way before playing the Mountaineers and Cardinals, but going to back-to-back bowl games is nothing to sneeze at, considering the program didn't exist not that long ago.

4. Pitt
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 4-3
Best Player: LB H.B. Blades, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Pitt wins the Big East title. Crank the expectations up a notch. This team should be an experienced, hardened squad by mid-November. It's not often you get ten games to prepare for your two biggest home games.

5. Rutgers
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 3-4
Best Player: FB Brian Leonard, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Rutgers goes back to a bowl game. The program has gone to back-to-back bowls ... never. Considering there have been two bowl appearances in over 130 years of Rutgers football, two straight would be a really big deal.

6. Connecticut
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 2-5
Best Player: RB Terry Caulley, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Huskies win eight games. The expectations for the defense have to be sky-high after last year, while the offense will have more of a passing game and an even more explosive ground attack. The schedule is soft enough that anything less than a winning season will be a big disappointment.

T7. Cincinnati
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-6
Best Player: TE Brent Celek, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Cincinnati wins seven games. There are mile-wide holes and several major problems to overcome, but the schedule isn't all that bad. UC had to build from the bottom up. The patience will pay off by the end of this year and into 2007.

T7. Syracuse
Predicted record: 3-9 **Conf. record:** 1-6
Best Player: LB Kelvin Smith, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Syracuse wins six games. It would be a huge turnaround considering how bad the team was last year. There have to be some signs of life. Head coach Greg Robinson's future might depend on it.

BIG TEN

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

The Big Ten might not be as good overall as it has been in past seasons, but it's not going to be the walk in the park for Ohio State that many think it will. With several good veteran quarterbacks returning and plenty of parity, expect plenty of scoring and lots of unpredictability from this evenly balanced league. Michigan State, Minnesota and Purdue aren't going to be in the Big Ten title chase, but each has the type of attack that could blow up and ruin someone's dream season. Even the potential cellar-dwellers, Indiana, Illinois and Northwestern, will be dangerous. Expect weekly drama as high as any conference in the country with Ohio State, Iowa, Penn State and Michigan locked in a tremendous battle to see who can be in the BCS dance.

3 THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

1. Welcome to a leaner, meaner, angrier Michigan. These aren't the bruising Wolverines of the past. This is Lloyd Carr's most athletic team yet.
2. For the third straight season, Wisconsin will start out red-hot and get flattened in November. 9-1 is possible before facing Penn State and a road trip to Iowa.
3. Ohio State won't slip much in the defensive back seven despite all the huge losses. The secondary will be tremendous as the season goes on.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Sept. 30 Ohio State at Iowa

An Iowa win in Kinnick Stadium over the Buckeyes would likely mean it's a one-game season (October 21st at Michigan) for the Big Ten title. Ohio State will be coming off a tough battle with Penn State and could be walking into a bear trap.

ALL-BIG TEN OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
QB Troy Smith, Ohio State

Could Smith be this year's version of Vince Young, and be a do-it-all star who carries his team to a title? After being suspended for the season opener and coming off the bench for the Texas game, he took over and was fantastic, showing off an accurate arm along with tremendous rushing skills.

QB	Troy Smith, Sr.	Ohio State
RB	Tyrell Sutton, Soph.	Northwestern
RB	Albert Young, Jr.	Iowa
WR	Dorien Bryant, Jr.	Purdue
WR	Ted Ginn, Jr.	Ohio State
TE	Matt Spaeth, Sr.	Minnesota
OL	Alex Boone, Soph.	Ohio State
OL	Levi Brown, Sr.	Penn State
OL	Jake Long, Jr.	Michigan
OL	Trevor Rees, Jr.	Northwestern
OL	Joe Thomas, Sr.	Wisconsin
PK	Kyle Schlicher, Sr.	Iowa
KR	Ted Ginn, Jr.	Ohio State

ALL-BIG TEN DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
LB Paul Posluszny, Penn State

The Butkus Award winner as the nation's best linebacker last season, Posluszny has 256 career tackles and should finish his great career with well over 350 if he can return 100% from a knee injury suffered in the Orange Bowl. Considered a likely first-round draft pick if he had come out early, even with the knee injury, he's a smart, tough tackler who's always in the right position and is always around the ball.

DL	Jay Alford, Sr.	Penn State
DL	Ken Iwebema, Jr.	Iowa
DL	Quinn Pitcock, Sr.	Ohio State
DL	LaMarr Woodley, Sr.	Michigan
LB	Dan Connor, Jr.	Penn State
LB	Paul Posluszny, Sr.	Penn State
LB	Mark Zalewski, Sr.	Wisconsin
DB	Marquice Cole, Sr.	Northwestern
DB	Leon Hall, Sr.	Michigan
DB	Justin King, Soph.	Penn State
DB	Joe Stellmacher, Sr.	Wisconsin
P	Ken DeBauche, Jr.	Wisconsin
PR	Steve Breaston, Sr.	Michigan

T1. Iowa
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: QB Drew Tate, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Hawkeyes win 11 games and come up with at least a share of the Big Ten title. They'll be favored in every conference game but two (at Michigan and home against Ohio State).

T1. Ohio State
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: QB Troy Smith, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Buckeyes play for the national title. The schedule is favorable and the Texas games comes just early enough that anything less than a game on January 8th, 2007 in Glendale, Arizona will be a major disappointment.

T3. Michigan
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: RB Mike Hart, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Michigan wins 11 games and beats Ohio State. The schedule has too many problems to go unbeaten, but the team is good enough to be in the hunt for a huge year.

T3. Penn State
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: LB Paul Posluszny, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... PSU finishes second in the Big Ten race. It's not a good enough team to get through the conference season unscathed, but there won't be much of a slip, either.

5. Wisconsin
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 5-3
Best Player: OT Joe Thomas, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UW wins at least a share of the Big Ten title. There are way too many question marks to ask for an unbeaten season, but the talent is good enough and the schedule is relatively easy.

6. Michigan State
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: QB Drew Stanton, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Spartans win nine games and go to a bowl. This is hardly a great team, but there's no excuse to not win at least eight, with a win over a power like Ohio State or Notre Dame thrown in there.

T7. Illinois
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 2-8
Best Player: RB Pierre Thomas, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Illinois wins five games. Getting to six and a bowl game might be a little too much to ask out of a team that still needs a few years to emerge.

T7. Purdue
Predicted record: 7-6 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: WR Dorien Bryant, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Purdue wins eight games. The 13-game schedule has plenty of rough patches, but there are only six games against bowl teams from last year.

9. Minnesota
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: TE Matt Spaeth, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Minnesota wins seven games and goes to another bowl. There are enough layups to have a nice base of four wins, and some upsets have to come.

T10. Indiana
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: WR James Hardy, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... IU wins six games. It's a tall, tall, tall order for such a young team and with so many new starters.

T10. Northwestern
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: RB Tyrell Sutton, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... the Wildcats win seven games and go back to a bowl, but with the tragic death of head coach Randy Walker, who knows what shape the program will be in.

BIG 12

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

Expect a big bounce-back year from a league that had Texas, Oklahoma and Texas Tech, and then a bunch of mediocre teams over the past two seasons. The North is appreciably better with the re-emergence of Nebraska to national prominence, and Iowa State has one of its strongest teams ever. Texas Tech will still be a thorn in everyone's side, while Texas A&M should rebound after struggling thus far in the Dennis Franchione era. Colorado will be an X factor with Dan Hawkins taking over, adding more offensive firepower to this already-explosive conference. Of course, it will be all about the Sooners and Longhorns, at least early on, with both powerhouses among the handful of national title favorites. Are those two going to roll? Not likely. This should be the strongest the league has been from top to bottom since it was formed in 1996.

3 THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

1. Texas and Oklahoma will each lose a conference game outside of the Red River Rivalry. The Longhorns have to play back-to-back road games at Nebraska and Texas Tech, while OU could get tagged at either Missouri or Texas A&M.
2. Expect the quarterback play to be mediocre early on. You don't immediately replace Vince Young, Brad Smith, Reggie McNeal, Cody Hodges and Joel Klatt without going through some growing pains.
3. Keep an eye on how effective Oklahoma star RB Adrian Peterson is late in the year. Watch for a crankier-than-usual Bob Stoops if he has to answer questions about Peterson's health if the star has 200 carries under his belt by the time the Missouri game rolls around.

GAME OF THE YEAR

October 7, Oklahoma vs. Texas
Last year's 45-12 Longhorn drubbing of OU can be chalked up to a hurt Adrian Peterson, a not-ready-yet Rhett Bomar, and the magical Longhorn season. Two straight losses would mean the hex Bob Stoops once held over Mack Brown would officially be over, but a Sooner win would mean last year might have just been a fluky convergence of everything right happening for the orange side of the field.

ALL-BIG 12 OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
RB Adrian Peterson, Oklahoma
The best player in college football and the number one pick in the draft if/when he decides to come out next season, this franchise back has to stay healthy for a full season. He had problems with an ankle injury during the middle part of last year, carrying the ball a mere 16 times over a four-game span. Then he got healthy and ripped up the back half of the season with four straight 100-yard days, highlighted by a breathtaking 237-yard performance against Oklahoma State. He's a tremendous mix of 6-2 size, warp speed, and a warrior's mentality. His running style is a bit too upright and he takes a few too many big shots, but that's nitpicking for the NFL types to worry about.

QB	Zac Taylor, Sr.	Nebraska
RB	Jamaal Charles, Soph.	Texas
RB	Adrian Peterson, Jr.	Oklahoma
WR	Joel Filani, Sr.	Texas Tech
WR	Jarrett Hicks, Sr.,	Texas Tech
TE	Chase Coffman, Soph.	Missouri
OL	Justin Blalock, Sr.	Texas
OL	Mark Fenton, Sr.	Colorado
OL	Corey Hilliard, Sr.	Oklahoma State
OL	Adam Spieker, Jr.	Missouri
OL	Kasey Studdard, Sr.	Texas
PK	Mason Crosby, Sr.	Colorado
KR	DeAndre Jackson, Sr.	Iowa State

ALL-BIG 12 DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
S Michael Griffin, Texas
238 career tackles isn't bad for a former running back. Michael Huff won the Thorpe Award as the nation's best defensive back last season, but it could be argued that Longhorn teammate Griffin had the better year. He's one of the nation's best defensive backs, with next-level playmaking ability and unlimited range.

DL	Larry Birdine, Sr.	Oklahoma
DL	Adam Carriker, Sr.	Nebraska
DL	Tim Crowder, Sr.	Texas
DL	Brian Smith, Sr.	Missouri
LB	Rufus Alexander, Sr.	Oklahoma
LB	Justin Warren, Sr.	Texas A&M
LB	Thaddeus Washington, Sr.	Colorado
DB	J.J. Billingsley, Sr.	Colorado
DB	Michael Griffin, Sr.	Texas
DB	DeAndre Jackson, Sr.	Iowa State
DB	David Overstreet, Sr.	Missouri
P	Daniel Sepulveda, Sr.	Baylor
PR	Aaron Ross, Sr.	Texas

Adam Carriker — Brian Bahr/Getty

NORTH DIVISION

1. Nebraska
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: DE Adam Carriker, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Huskers win the Big 12 North. While many will set their sights on winning the league championship, this isn't as good a team as Oklahoma or Texas. Just getting to the title game for the first time since 1999 would be a fantastic step forward.

2. Colorado
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: PK Mason Crosby, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Buffs finish second in the Big 12 North. The schedule is too brutal and the rest of the division has improved too much to reasonably expect a fifth Big 12 title appearance in six years.

3. Iowa State
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: WR Todd Blythe, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... the Cyclones win the Big 12 North. After the last few seasons and with ten returning starters on offense, anything less than a 14-game season will be a tremendous disappointment.

4. Missouri
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: DE Brian Smith, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Tigers win the Big 12 North. It's going to take plenty of upsets, but this team is too experienced to shoot for anything less.

5. Kansas
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: C David Ochoa, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... KU wins seven regular season games and goes back to a bowl game. If it can take advantage of the relatively soft schedule and the offense can come together, then it'll be the first time in the school's history for back-to-back bowls.

6. Kansas State
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: LB Brandon Archer, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... KSU gets back to a bowl game. There are plenty of problems and too much young talent to count on for a big season, but the schedule is breezy enough to fall into a few wins simply by showing up.

SOUTH DIVISION

1. Oklahoma
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: RB Adrian Peterson, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... OU wins the Big 12 championship. There are just enough holes to prevent a trip to the BCS title game, but a win over Texas on the way back to the top of the conference heap would do wonders after last year's slip.

2. Texas
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: OT Justin Blalock, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Texas plays for the national title. After last year, would anything less be acceptable? If there isn't a Big 12 title, the heat will be back on Mack Brown.

T3. Texas Tech
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: WR Jarrett Hicks, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Texas Tech wins ten games. It hasn't happened yet under Coach Mike Leach, despite coming close last year. The offense is good enough to simply out-bomb most of the better Big 12 teams.

T3. Texas A&M
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: LB Justin Warren, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... A&M wins eight games and goes to a bowl. Anything less means a new coaching staff will be in place next year at this time.

5. Baylor
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: P Daniel Sepulveda, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... BU wins six games. It's a far taller task than it might seem, with the only sure wins to come against Northwestern State and Army.

6. Oklahoma State
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: OT Corey Hilliard, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... OSU comes up with a winning season. Considering it'll likely be the underdog in every Big 12 game except the home date against Baylor, there can't be any misses in the non-conference schedule.

C-USA

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

Is this going to be the most wide-open conference race in all of college football? Tulsa and UCF played in last year's championship game, but they're hardly a lock to win their respective divisions, with Southern Miss, UTEP and Houston each appearing to be more stable than last season. If UCF can go from worst to almost first, and Tulsa can come out of nowhere, then it shouldn't be a shock if a rising program like East Carolina or Marshall pulls off the East title. SMU is on the verge of respectability and Memphis should be a factor from start to finish. The overall level of play should be raised with plenty of offensive stars, and unlike past years, a little more defense from teams like UTEP, Houston and UCF. Basically, expect a whole bunch of fun.

3 THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

1. The West will be the far weaker of the two divisions thanks to Tulane and Rice. SMU, despite being better, would likely finish last in the East. Even so ...
2. ... the West will have loads of firepower thanks to all the veteran quarterbacks. UTEP's Jordan Palmer, Houston's Kevin Kolb, Tulsa's Paul Smith and Tulane's Lester Ricard will put up points in bunches.
3. Memphis obviously will miss RB DeAngelo Williams, but Joseph Doss is a quick back who'll put up huge yards, while Jamarcus Gaither and T.J. Pitts each will have some big days.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Oct. 21, UTEP at Houston.
The Cougars and Miners each have tremendous firepower, led by their great quarterbacks. Houston's Kevin Kolb and UTEP's Jordan Palmer will battle it out for the upper hand in the West Division race.

ALL-CUSA OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
QB Kevin Kolb, Houston
The senior has cranked out 9,752 yards of career offense with 55 touchdown passes and 17 touchdown runs. Considering his talented receivers, and given that he threw for 3,258 yards last year, he has a chance to become Conference USA's all-time leading passer this year, if he can pass for 3,387 more yards.

QB	Kevin Kolb, Sr.	Houston
RB	Ahmad Bradshaw, Jr.	Marshall
RB	DeMyron Martin, Soph.	SMU
WR	Aundrae Allison, Sr.	East Carolina
WR	Vincent Marshall, Sr.	Houston
TE	Shawn Nelson, Soph.	Southern Miss
OL	George Batiste. Sr.	Southern Miss
OL	Blake Butler, Sr.	Memphis
OL	Cedric Gagne-Marcoux, Sr.	UCF
OL	Jeff Perrett, Sr.	Tulsa
OL	Cornelius Rogers, Sr.	UAB
PK	Darren McCaleb, Sr.	Southern Miss
KR	Jessie Henderson, Soph.	SMU

ALL-CUSA DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
FS Wesley Smith, Memphis
The All-America safety made 98 tackles as a freshman, 89 as a sophomore and 82 last year, earning first-team All-Conference USA honors in each season. He's big, fast and as sure a tackling defensive back as there is in the country.

DL	Marcus Hands, Jr.	East Carolina
DL	Adrian Haywood, Sr.	SMU
DL	Larry McSwain, Sr.	UAB
DL	Alex Obomese, Sr.	UTEP
LB	Matt Couch, Sr.	Marshall
LB	Nick Bunting, Sr.	Tulsa
LB	Jeremy Jones, Sr.	UTEP
DB	Joe Burnett, Soph.	UCF
DB	Curtis Keyes, Sr.	Marshall
DB	Wesley Smith, Sr.	Memphis
DB	Joe Sturdivant, Sr.	SMU
P	Michael Gibson, Sr.	Memphis
PR	Joe Burnett, Soph.	UCF

EAST DIVISION

T1. Southern Miss
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: OG George Batiste, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Southern Miss wins the Conference USA title. This is one of the few league programs that can honestly shoot for the big prize each and every year. Another New Orleans Bowl appearance will be a major disappointment.

T1. East Carolina
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: WR Aundrae Allison, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... ECU finishes with a winning year and goes to a bowl. If it's going to happen, they need a hot start and a few upsets over the second half of the year. Pirate fans are still trying to erase memories of their last post-season appearance, the 64-61 loss to Marshall in the 2001 GMAC Bowl.

3. UCF
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 5-3
Best Player: RB Kevin Smith, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... UCF gets back to a bowl game. Yeah, it'll be title or bust with the way last season went, but the schedule is too tough to demand or expect a second straight East championship. Another eight-win season would be fantastic.

T4. Memphis
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: FS Wesley Smith, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Memphis wins the East. While it's a tall order considering all the uncertainty on defense, the schedule and the firepower on offense should be enough to come close.

T4. Marshall
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: RB Ahmad Bradshaw, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Marshall wins the East. The league is better, but it's not all that great, and a good team could rise up in a hurry. Marshall has way too much experience to be as bad as last year and needs to make winning the East the main goal.

6. UAB
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: LB Larry McSwain, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UAB wins the East. It's dreaming big for a team that's not nearly as complete or as strong as several others in Conference USA, but it should be in the mix for the East title until late November. The sky's the limit if the quarterback situation becomes a positive.

WEST DIVISION

1. UTEP
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: QB Jordan Palmer, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UTEP wins the Conference USA title. Tulsa might be the league's best team, but UTEP is hardly going to whither as the second banana despite away games at Houston and Tulsa as part of a stretch of four conference road trips in five weeks.

T2. Tulsa
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 5-3
Best Player: LB Nick Bunting, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Tulsa wins the Conference USA title. This is the league's best team, and anything less than a second straight championship will be seen as a failure, no matter what else the team does.

T2. Houston
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 5-3
Best Player: QB Kevin Kolb, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Houston wins the Conference USA title. They won't have the same mix of starting experience and a favorable schedule again for a long time. The first ten-win season since 1990 is also an attainable goal.

4. SMU
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: RB DeMyron Martin, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... SMU has a winning season. There are way too many holes to win the West, but the schedule is soft enough to aim for seven wins and a possible bowl bid. It would be a disaster if this is another losing season.

5. Tulane
Predicted record: 3-9 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: QB Lester Ricard, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Tulane wins six games. It's not going to be easy; the Green Wave will be likely underdogs in their seven road games. It's going to require being nearly perfect at home and getting a road upset to get to .500.

6. Rice
Predicted record: 0-12 **Conf. record:** 0-8
Best Player: S Chad Price, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Rice comes up with three wins. It came close to beating UCF and UTEP in the second half of last season and it beat Tulane, but it's going to take big upsets to come close to winning more than a few games.

MAC

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

Expect more of the same. Sure, Central Michigan, Western Michigan and Ball State will be better, making the West a nastier division, but it'll be Northern Illinois and defending champion Akron the favorites to meet again for the title. Despite being in the chase for the championship, Toledo, Bowling Green and Miami have to do some rebuilding. None of the five top teams is a world-beater and it'll take a big upset to make much non-conference noise, despite several high-profile games against good BCS programs. The spotlight will shine brightest on NIU and star RB Garrett Wolfe, who'll be a threat for 2,000 yards, giving the league a much-needed marquee star after losing Bruce Gradkowski, Greg Jennings and Omar Jacobs.

3 THINGS TO WATCH FOR

1. The West will be far better than the East. Ohio, Kent State and Buffalo would all likely finish at the West bottom, while Eastern Michigan would have a shot at a top-four spot if it was in the East.
2. Ball State will be this year's sleeper. It beat NIU and Akron late last year once all the team's suspensions were served, and should come out strong with Eastern Michigan and Buffalo in two of its first three MAC games.
3. Akron head coach J.D. Brookhart will have a higher profile gig next year at this time.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Nov. 7th Toledo at Northern Illinois.

The Rockets had absolutely owned the Huskies until a stunning 35-17 NIU win last year in the Rubber Bowl changed all of that. These should be the two best teams in the MAC, with the winner of this nationally televised showdown almost certain to represent the West in the conference title game.

ALL-MAC OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
RB Garrett Wolfe, Northern Illinois

One of the best backs in college football, the diminutive 5-7, 173-pound senior is quick enough to zip around defenders and strong enough to power his way over bigger ones. He's one of the strongest pound-for-pound players in the game to go along with phenomenal instincts and a burst of speed when he gets into the clear; he's simply one of the game's most dynamic backs.

QB	Phil Horvath, Sr.	Northern Illinois
RB	Ontario Sneed, Soph.	Central Michigan
RB	Garrett Wolfe, Sr.	Northern Illinois
WR	Steve Odom, Sr.	Toledo
WR	Ryne Robinson, Sr.	Miami Univ.
TE	Chad Upshaw, Sr.	Buffalo
OL	Jon Brost, Soph.	Northern Illinois
OL	Doug Free, Sr.	Northern Illinois
OL	John Greco, Jr.	Toledo
OL	Kory Lichtensteiger, Jr.	Bowling Green
OL	Joe Staley, Sr.	Central Michigan
PK	Andrew Wallock, Sr.	Eastern Michigan
KR	Scott Mayle, Sr.	Ohio

ALL-MAC DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
DE Dan Bazuin, Central Michigan

The senior is known for being one of the nation's dominant pass rushers with 16 sacks and 26.5 tackles for loss last year, but he's also a tremendous run defender, finishing second on the team in tackles. Watch his profile skyrocket if he has big games early against Boston College and Michigan.

DL	Dan Bazuin, Sr.	Central Michigan
DL	Danny Muir, Sr.	Kent State
DL	Devon Parks, Sr.	Bowling Green
DL	Jermaine Reid, Sr.	Akron
LB	Mike Alston, Sr.	Toledo
LB	Thomas Keith, Jr.	Central Michigan
LB	Matt Muncy, Sr.	Ohio
DB	Joey Card, Sr.	Miami Univ.
DB	Tyrrell Herbert, Jr.	Toledo
DB	Dustin Utschig, Sr.	Northern Illinois
DB	Jack Williams, Jr.	Kent State
P	Chris Miller, Soph.	Ball State
PR	Ryne Robinson, Sr.	Miami Univ.

EAST DIVISION

T1. Akron
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: QB Luke Getsy, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Akron wins the MAC title. How do you shoot for anything less after winning it all last year? Even with seven road games, a ten-win season is very possible, as long as there's a second championship and a bowl victory.

T1. Miami University
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: WR/PR Ryne Robinson, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Miami wins the East. Even with all the new starters this will still be among the league's most talented teams. Anything less than playing for the MAC title will be a disappointment, but that's setting the bar way too high if the injury bug strikes early on.

3. Bowling Green
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 5-3
Best Player: DE Devon Parks, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Bowling Green wins the East. The schedule works out well with the division's best team, Miami, coming to Perry Stadium. The possibility of a ten-win regular season is there, with the biggest MAC games coming at the end of the year when the team will be as developed as it's going to be.

T4. Buffalo
Predicted record: 2-10 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: TE Chad Upshaw, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UB wins four games. Considering the Bulls haven't won more than three since moving to D-I, a four-victory season would be reason for a parade.

T4. Kent State
Predicted record: 2-10 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: DE Daniel Muir, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Kent State wins five games. There's enough experience to expect a good year, and there's no reason not to get a few wins against teams like Army, Temple, Ohio, Buffalo, Eastern Michigan and Ball State.

T4. Ohio
Predicted record: 2-10 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: LB Matt Muncy, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... OU win six games. That's a much, much bigger goal than it might seem with a team that returns plenty of experience after a four-win campaign. The overall talent level still isn't there compared to the better MAC teams.

WEST DIVISION

T1. Northern Illinois
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: RB Garrett Wolfe, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... NIU wins the MAC title. It's never fun when anything less than a championship is a failure of a season, but it has gotten to that point for the Huskies.

T1. Toledo
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: OT John Greco, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Toledo wins the MAC title. The schedule works out well enough and the experience and talent is in place. Finding a way to get by a road trip to Northern Illinois will be key, but they also must avoid a slip against the rest of the MAC teams.

T3. Central Michigan
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: DE Dan Bazuin, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... CMU wins seven games. The schedule might be a wee bit too demanding to win the MAC West, but there's too much experience and too many good things happening on both sides of the ball for a down year.

T3. Ball State
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: QB Joey Lynch, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Ball State comes up with six wins. If the team can go 4-7 last year with all the problems it had, then an extra two victories this year with so many returning veterans is a more-than-attainable goal.

T3. Western Michigan
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: LB Ameer Ismail, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... WMU wins the West. There are plenty of problems and this team might be a year away from truly being a threat for the MAC title, but the schedule works out well and there's enough experience to be the division champion right now.

6. Eastern Michigan
Predicted record: 3-9 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: WR Eric Deslauriers, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... EMU wins six games. This isn't a good enough team to even think about winning the MAC title, but the team hasn't won more than four games in a season since 1995 and getting five or six victories would be a nice stepping stone.

MTN WEST

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

Utah broke through the BCS barrier in 2004, and TCU would've gotten in last year if the 2006 rules applied. Now the league is sniffing the big-time more and more with the Utes, Horned Frogs and BYU all dreaming, and deserving, of the major game spotlight. This isn't a great conference, as Air Force, UNLV and Wyoming are all mediocre, but it's the best of the non-traditional big-six BCS leagues and is sure to represent itself well in non-conference games. Even with the disparity between the top teams and the potential average ones, as always, there will be several upsets along the way. Expect San Diego State to be stronger under new head coach Chuck Long, and New Mexico and Colorado State each good enough to go bowling.

3 THINGS TO WATCH FOR

1. There will be weekly battles between some of the most interesting offenses in the game. Utah, BYU and UNLV will all run some form of the spread. Air Force will try to be more balanced, and former UCLA head coach Bob Toledo is taking over the offensive coordinator duties at New Mexico.
2. If San Diego State RB Lynell Hamilton can finally stay healthy, he'll make a big push for Mountain West Player of the Year honors.
3. No one will want to play UNLV over the second half of the year. The addition of USC QB Rocky Hinds, JUCO WR Aaron Straiten, USC CB Eric Wright, and UCLA CB Mil'Von James will make the Rebels dangerous.

GAME OF THE YEAR

October 5th, TCU at Utah.

Running the Mountain West table is possible if the Horned Frogs can get over this brutal road trip to Salt Lake City. TCU won a 23-20 overtime classic last year to launch its big season, and now Utah will be looking to do the same. It's not an overstatement to think this might be the Mountain West title game.

ALL-MWEST OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
QB Brian Johnson, Utah

Johnson was becoming a superstar last year when he went down with a torn ACL. He's expected to be back at full strength this fall, but he'll have to battle with Brett Ratliff for the starting job. Johnson is the better player, but his knee has to be 100%.

QB	Brian Johnson, Jr.	Utah
RB	Kyle Bell, Jr.	Colorado State
RB	Lynell Hamilton, Jr.	San Diego State
WR	Brian Hernandez, Sr.	Utah
WR	Johnny Walker, Jr.	Colorado State
TE	Jonny Harline, Sr.	BYU
OL	Jake Kuresa, Sr.	BYU
OL	Dallas Reynolds, Soph.	BYU
OL	Herbert Taylor, Sr.	TCU
OL	Tavo Tupola, Sr.	Utah
OL	Robert Turner, Sr.	New Mexico
PK	Kenny Byrd, Sr.	New Mexico
KR	Hoost Marsh, Jr.	Wyoming

ALL-MWEST DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
SS Eric Weddle, Utah

Weddle has 213 career tackles, 20 tackles for loss, and nine sacks to go along with a boatload of big plays against the pass. He's a phenomenal all-around athlete who has seen time almost everywhere during his career, from safety to cornerback to quarterback to punter to punt returner.

DL	Antwan Applewhite, Jr.	San Diego State
DL	Tommy Blake, Jr.	TCU
DL	Howie Fuimaono, Sr.	UNLV
DL	Chase Ortiz, Jr.	TCU
LB	Beau Bell, Jr.	UNLV
LB	Casey Evans, Sr.	Utah
LB	Cameron Jensen, Sr.	BYU
DB	Terrell Maze, Sr.	San Diego State
DB	Robert Herbert, Sr.	Colorado State
DB	Eric Wright, Jr.	UNLV
DB	Eric Weddle, Sr.	Utah
P	Jimmy Kaylor, Jr.	Colorado State
PR	Hoost Marsh, Jr.	Wyoming

Eric Weddle — George Frey/Getty

1. Utah
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 8-0
Best Player: SS Eric Weddle, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Utes win the Mountain West title. The four conference road games are against teams that didn't go to a bowl last year. Anything less than a championship will be a major disappointment.

T2. TCU
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: DE Tommy Blake, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... TCU repeats as Mountain West champions. With all the returning talent and the success of last year, there's no reason to expect less. A spot in the BCS is an attainable goal if there's an early win over Texas Tech.

T2. BYU
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: QB John Beck, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Cougars finish second in the Mountain West. This is a relatively lofty goal considering the defense is mediocre at best, and BYU faces road trips to TCU and Utah. The offense will simply out-bomb everyone else.

4. Colorado State
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 4-4
Best Player: RB Kyle Bell, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... CSU finishes second in the Mountain West. There are issues everywhere, from depth problems on the offensive line, to a lack of a proven number-one receiver, to the major concerns with the run defense.

T5. New Mexico
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: OT Robert Turner, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Lobos finish second in the Mountain West. They're not as good as TCU or Utah, but they get to play those two league favorites at home, and they have enough overall talent to be in the hunt for the title.

T5. Air Force
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: QB Shaun Carney, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Air Force has a winning season. This is probably no better than the sixth or seventh best team in the conference, but the schedule works out nicely with only three games (at Tennessee, Notre Dame and at TCU) that it likely has little chance of winning.

T7. San Diego State
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: RB Lynell Hamilton, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... the Aztecs win eight games. It's not that lofty a goal if the new coaching staff can get a little more production out of the run defense and more efficiency and consistency out of the offense.

T7. UNLV
Predicted record: 3-9 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: CB Eric Wright, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... the Rebels win six games. There's still a long way to go talent-wise, and the early schedule is way too tough to hope for any sort of run for a conference title, but that doesn't mean this improved team can't be in the hunt for a bowl game.

T7. Wyoming
Predicted record: 3-9 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: SS John Wendling, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UW gets to a bowl game. If the team is any good, it should beat Utah State, Air Force and San Diego State, and it needs to win road games at Syracuse, New Mexico and UNLV. A big upset here or there will also be a must.

PAC TEN

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

Overrated by Left Coasters and unnoticed by the right side of the country, the non-USC Pac-10 teams were decent, but nothing special over the last few years. Not anymore. Expect the league to come roaring back with more than just the mighty Trojans. Cal is a legitimate national title contender, Oregon and Arizona State are good enough to challenge for an at-large BCS slot, and everyone else outside of UCLA should be better than last year. Stanford, Washington State and Oregon State will be far more dangerous and will be a tough battle every week, and Arizona should finally put it all together under Mike Stoops and be more consistent. Of course, all eyes will be on USC to see if it can reload and remain a juggernaut. The Trojans will continue to bring attention to the league; the rest of the country then may notice how good everyone else is.

3 THINGS TO WATCH FOR

1. Almost by default, the starting USC quarterback will be a Heisman finalist. John David Booty and Mark Sanchez are really that good, and they have the talent around them to put up Matt Leinart-like numbers.
2. The addition of defensive ends Loren Howard from Northwestern and Tranell Morant from Florida along with former BYU tackle Michael Marquardt will make Arizona State a factor in the Pac-10 race.
3. California's linebacking corps might not just be the Pac-10's best: it might be the best in the country. The world will notice in the opener at Tennessee.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Nov. 18 California at USC

Each team has major landmines to step around, but this should be the battle for the Pac-10 title, and with a little luck here and there, this could be for a spot in the national title game.

ALL - PAC-10 OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
WR Dwayne Jarrett, USC

This is assuming he's back after having problems with the NCAA. He can do it all, with too much size for most college corners and too much athleticism to be nullified by a double-team. He was the best wide receiver in America last year, but now he'll have to shine without Matt Leinart throwing him the ball.

QB	Sam Keller, Sr.	Arizona State
RB	Yvenson Bernard, Jr.	Oregon State
RB	Marshawn Lynch, Jr.	California
WR	Jason Hill, Sr.	Washington State
WR	Dwayne Jarrett, Jr.	USC
TE	Zach Miller, Jr.	Arizona State
OL	Sam Baker, Sr.	USC
OL	Ryan Kalil, Sr.	USC
OL	Enoka Lucas, Sr.	Oregon
OL	Roy Schuening, Jr.	Oregon State
OL	Shannon Tevaga, Jr.	UCLA
PK	Alexis Serna, Jr.	Oregon State
KR	Terry Richardson, Sr.	Arizona State

ALL-PAC 10 DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
DT Brandon Mebane, California

He's a defensive end built into a 6-3, 306-pound body with tremendous quickness into the backfield. He was one of the league's top linemen last year even though he suffered through an ankle injury and constant double-teaming.

DL	Mkristo Bruce, Sr.	Washington State
DL	Sedrick Ellis, Jr.	USC
DL	Lawrence Jackson, Jr.	USC
DL	Brandon Mebane, Sr.	California
LB	Rey Maualuga, Soph	USC
LB	Keith Rivers, Jr.	USC
LB	Desmond Bishop, Sr.	California
DB	Antoine Cason, Jr.	Arizona
DB	Patrick Chung, Soph.	Oregon
DB	Daymeion Hughes, Sr.	California
DB	Sabby Piscitelli, Sr.	Oregon State
P	Sean Douglas, Sr.	Washington
PR	Terry Richardson, Sr.	Arizona State

John David Booty — Stephen Dunn/Getty

1. USC
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 8-1
Best Player: WR Dwayne Jarrett, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... USC plays for the national title. Would just winning the Pac-10 and going to a BCS game be good enough at this point? It should be, but the bar is set ridiculously high after going 54-10 under Pete Carroll and losing just two games in three years.

2. California
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 7-2
Best Player: RB Marshawn Lynch, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Cal wins the Pac-10 title. It's time to take that next step up. It might be asking a lot to win the championship with a game at USC to worry about, but the Bears are good enough to dream big.

T3. Oregon State
Predicted record: 7-6 **Conf. record:** 5-4
Best Player: RB Yvenson Bernard, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... the Beavers flirt with winning ten. It might take 14 games to do it including a bowl trip, but it's possible if they don't screw up against the teams they're supposed to beat.

T3. Arizona State
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 5-4
Best Player: TE Zach Miller, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... ASU wins the Pac-10 title. Enough is enough. There's more than enough experience, talent, and athleticism to win the title and get to the BCS.

T3. Oregon
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 5-4
Best Player: RB/KR Jonathan Stewart, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... Oregon wins nine games. Duck fans will be hoping last year was the start of something big, but the schedule has too many pitfalls and the team is too incomplete.

6. Washington State
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 4-5
Best Player: WR Jason Hill, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... The Cougars win eight games. The team is two seasons removed from a run of three straight ten-win seasons and needs to get back on the winning track.

T7. UCLA
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 3-6
Best Player: CB Ben Olson, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... UCLA finishes in the top four of the Pac 10. There are simply way, way too many question marks and way too much youth to reasonably expect a run for the Pac 10 title.

T7. Stanford
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 3-6
Best Player: QB Trent Edwards, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Stanford wins seven games. It's a better team than last year when it won five games and came within a loss to UC Davis of going to a bowl game.

T7. Arizona
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 3-6
Best Player: CB Antoine Cason, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Arizona gets to a bowl game. While there's a ton of experience, next year will be when the Wildcats can reasonably be a factor in the Pac-10 title race.

10. Washington
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 2-7
Best Player: SS C.J. Wallace, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UW wins seven games. There has to be a big upset or two to set a fire under the fan base, while a win over Washington State would do wonders to get the program rolling into 2007.

SEC

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

The SEC might have been mediocre last year by its own high standards, but it's back to being the best conference in the nation...and it's not even close. Even so, everyone appears to be a year away from being really, really, really good. Urban Meyer is recruiting his tail off at Florida on his way to creating USC East, SEC champ Georgia is nasty again despite needing to reload, Tennessee will quickly rebound with David Cutcliffe as offensive coordinator, and LSU and Auburn belong in the discussion of the five best teams in America. Alabama and South Carolina won't do what they did last year, but they'll still be solid. Arkansas will be back to its old bowl-bound ways, and Ole Miss and Mississippi State will be much improved.

3 THINGS TO WATCH FOR

1. Quarterback controversies. The SEC has never had so much young quarterback talent, and they're all ready to play. Georgia's Matthew Stafford, Florida's Tim Tebow, LSU's Ryan Perrilloux and Arkansas' Mitch Mustain all have NFL potential, but all will start out on the bench.
2. Florida and LSU each will finish with two losses despite being among the best teams in America. Most teams would struggle to go .500 with Florida's schedule.
3. The league will get its shots in on Steve Spurrier. South Carolina will start out 4-2 before hitting a scheduling wall.

GAME OF THE YEAR

September 16th, LSU at Auburn

The LSU version of the Tigers won a 20-17 thriller last season and has to come out of the conference opener with a win or face the daunting task of having to win in Gainesville and Knoxville to have any hope of playing for the SEC title. If Auburn wins, it should be 6-0 going into the showdown with Florida.

ALL-SEC OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
RB Kenny Irons, Auburn

The former South Carolina transfer ripped it up in last year's spring game and went on to be one of the SEC's best players. Irons had eight 100-yard days, showing off tremendous home-run speed, highlighted by a brilliant 218-yard day in the loss to LSU. He's not a power runner, but he's physical and doesn't go down easily. When he has a sliver of daylight, he'll tear off a huge gain. He's a superior athlete with next-level speed.

QB	Chris Leak, Sr.	Florida
RB	Kenny Irons, Sr.	Auburn
RB	Darren McFadden, Soph.	Arkansas
WR	Dwayne Bowe, Sr.	LSU
WR	Sidney Rice, Soph.	South Carolina
TE	Eric Butler, Jr.	Mississippi State
OL	Antoine Caldwell, Soph.	Alabama
OL	Daniel Inman, Sr.	Georgia
OL	Michael Oher, Soph.	Ole Miss
OL	Arron Sears, Sr.	Tennessee
OL	Brian Stamper, Sr.	Vanderbilt
PK	Brandon Coutu, Jr.	Georgia
KR	Felix Jones, Soph.	Arkansas

ALL-SEC DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
LB Patrick Willis, Ole Miss

Willis will no longer be the hidden gem that only SEC fans know about. He's a fast 6-2 and 230 pounds, and was good enough to have been no worse than a second-round NFL draft pick had he decided to leave early. Willis was dominating last season, with five games of double-digit solo tackles on the way to leading the nation in solo stops.

DL	Justin Harrell, Sr.	Tennessee
DL	Jarvis Moss, Jr.	Florida
DL	Quentin Moses, Sr.	Georgia
DL	Marcus Thomas, Sr.	Florida
LB	Sam Olajubutu, Sr.	Arkansas
LB	Brandon Siler, Jr.	Florida
LB	Patrick Willis, Sr.	Ole Miss
DB	Fred Bennett, Sr.	South Carolina
DB	Jonathan Hefney, Jr.	Tennessee
DB	LaRon Landry, Sr.	LSU
DB	Reggie Nelson, Jr.	Florida
P	Eric Wilbur, Sr.	Florida
PR	Rafael Little, Jr.	Kentucky

EAST DIVISION

1. Florida
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: QB Chris Leak, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Florida wins the SEC title. Who cares that the offense is still at least a year away from being up-to-Urban-snuff? Who cares that most teams would jump for joy to go 5-7 with Florida's schedule? Anything less than an SEC title might make the Gators this year's Tennessee.

2. Tennessee
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: OT Arron Sears, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Vols win the SEC East. After last year, anything less than an appearance in the SEC title game will leave the sour taste of 2005 in everyone's mouth. The schedule, athleticism, and fire are all in place for a good season.

3. Georgia
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 5-3
Best Player: DE Quentin Moses, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Georgia wins ten games. It doesn't have quite enough firepower to win the SEC title, or even the SEC East if Florida plays as well as expected and if Tennessee rebounds, but it'll get back to a bowl game and it should have a good chance at finishing with double-digit wins.

4. South Carolina
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: WR Sidney Rice, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... USC wins eight games. This team isn't great, but Steve Spurrier has enough offensive weapons to be more than competitive and crush someone's SEC title dreams.

5. Kentucky
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: RB Rafael Little, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... UK wins six games and is better against the top teams. Anything less than the post-season, especially with a relatively light schedule for an SEC East team, might mean the end of the Rich Brooks era.

6. Vanderbilt
Predicted record: 2-10 **Conf. record:** 0-8
Best Player: WR Earl Bennett, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... Vandy wins five games. Forget about beating the big boys without Jay Cutler slinging it anymore, but there's no reason it can't beat all the teams its own size.

WEST DIVISION

1. Auburn
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 7-1
Best Player: RB Kenny Irons, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Auburn wins the SEC title. That would make it an extremely impressive two in three years. It's not every season you get so many big conference games at home and the Tigers must take advantage.

T2. LSU
Predicted record: 10-2 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: FS LaRon Landry, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... LSU wins the SEC West. It's not going to be easy, but after playing for the title last year, anything less will be a major disappointment. This is a national title team with a great home schedule, but 10-2 in the regular season would be a big accomplishment with four brutal road games.

T2. Arkansas
Predicted record: 9-3 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: RB Darrren McFadden, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... the Hogs end up with a winning season and go to a bowl. Another losing season wouldn't get Nutt fired, but it would put him on double-secret probation for 2007.

T4. Alabama
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: RB Ken Darby, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Bama wins nine games. The home slate is too light to shoot for anything less, and an upset or two on the road will mean another double-digit year. Expecting to be a major factor in the SEC West race is asking for way too much considering all the new starters on defense.

T4. Ole Miss
Predicted record: 6-6 **Conf. record:** 3-5
Best Player: LB Patrick Willis, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... the Rebels win seven games. It'll take at least one big upset and no slip-ups against the teams its own size, but Ole Miss should be just good enough to be able to squeak out a few more wins.

6. Mississippi State
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: LB Quinton Culberson, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... MSU wins six games. The defense is too good and there are too many improvements on offense to expect another losing season. The Bulldogs won't battle for the SEC West title, but they could be the league's jump-up team.

SUN BELT

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

For better or worse, the Sun Belt will be the most even conference in the nation from one through eight. This dead-even league will have weekly battles without shocking upsets, thanks to parity and few sure things to count on among the contenders. North Texas should bounce back from last year's disaster to be in the hunt again, but UL Lafayette is the class of the conference with a ground game that should be enough to get them to the New Orleans Bowl. Florida International should be this year's high-riser after a strong end to the 2005 season. Arkansas State, Troy and Middle Tennessee will have good enough defenses to stay in the title hunt all year long.

3 THINGS TO WATCH FOR

1. After losing 26 of 27 games against other D-I teams last year, the Sun Belt will go winless outside of the league except for the D-IAA layups.
2. The best thing about the 2006 UL Monroe season will be the nickname change from Indians to Warhawks.
3. North Texas RB Jamario Thomas will be a threat for 2,000 yards behind an improved line and with all the carries coming his way.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Nov. 25th, Arkansas State at UL Lafayette

There might not be a closer set of games over the last ten years than the series played by the Indians and the Ragin' Cajuns. Since 1997, these two have played seven times, with ULL holding a 4-3 advantage with the four wins coming by a total of 11 points. ASU's wins have been by four, six and three. The winner of this year's showdown will likely win the conference title.

ALL-SUN BELT OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
RB Jamario Thomas, North Texas

He didn't get much work last year thanks to a hamstring problem and the return of Patrick Cobbs, but the speedy junior should regain the form that got him 1,801 yards and 17 scores in 2004.

QB	Clint Marks, Sr.	MTSU
RB	Eugene Gross, Sr.	MTSU
RB	Jamario Thomas, Jr	North Texas
WR	Johnny Quinn, Sr.	North Texas
WR	Chandler Williams, Sr.	FIU
TE	Samuel Smith, Sr.	FIU
OL	Kyle Cunningham, Jr.	U Monroe
OL	Brandon Cox, Sr.	UL Lafayette
OL	Nello Faulk, Sr.	Florida Atlantic
OL	Dylan Lineberry, Sr.	North Texas
OL	Aaron Schutz, Soph.	UL Monroe
PK	Greg Whibbs, Jr.	Troy
KR	Leodis McKelvin, Jr.	Troy

ALL-SUN BELT DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
LB Keyonvis Bouie, FIU

One of the nation's best-kept secrets will be unearthed this season. Bouie is a top tackler with phenomenal range and a nose for the ball. 150 tackles isn't out of the question if he stays healthy and plays a full 12 games.

DL	Antwan Barnes, Sr.	FIU
DL	Jeremiah Chapman, Jr.	North Texas
DL	Kenny Mainor, Soph.	Troy
DL	Ricky Williams, Jr.	UL Monroe
LB	Keyonvis Bouie, Sr.	FIU
LB	J.K. Sabb, Sr.	MTSU
LB	Josh Williams, Jr.	Arkansas State
DB	Tyrell Johnson, Jr.	Arkansas
DB	Kevin Payne, Sr. UL	UL Monroe
DB	Bradley Robinson, Jr.	MTSU
DB	Chaz Williams, Jr.	UL Monroe
P	Colby Smith, Sr.	MTSU
PR	Leodis McKelvin, Jr.	Troy

Jamario Thomas, Jr — College Football News

1. UL Lafayette
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 6-1
Best Player: OT Brandon Cox, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UL Lafayette wins eight games and the Sun Belt title. No one will stop this ground game, which must to be good enough to overcome the rest of the team's holes. This appears to be a program about to come of age.

2. Florida International
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 5-2
Best Player: LB Keyonvis Bouie, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... FIU finishes second in the Sun Belt race. It'll go into the season dreaming of winning the title, but there's not enough depth and there's still a D-IAA level of overall talent that'll keep this promising team from reaching its goal.

T3. MTSU
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 4-3
Best Player: QB Clint Marks, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... MTSU wins the Sun Belt title. Finishing second means nothing in this league. The Blue Raiders need to get by a nasty conference draw, and have to survive three two-game road trips.

T3. Arkansas State
Predicted record: 5-7 **Conf. record:** 4-3
Best Player: LB Josh Williams, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... ASU wins the Sun Belt title again. It'll be hard with the killer league road slate late, but there's no dialing down the expectations after last year. This team should be able to beat anyone in the conference, but it needs everything to come together early on to make it happen.

T3. North Texas
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 4-3
Best Player: RB Jamario Thomas, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... North Texas wins the Sun Belt title. It'll be a major, major accomplishment considering the conference road schedule, but after the past success, nothing else but a trip to the New Orleans Bowl will do.

6. Troy
Predicted record: 4-8 **Conf. record:** 3-4
Best Player: FS Sherrod Martin, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Troy wins the Sun Belt title. Just about every team is coming into the season thinking it can be the Sun Belt champs, but Troy really has a shot if the offense is a little better, and with its favorable conference schedule.

7. UL Monroe
Predicted record: 2-10 **Conf. record:** 1-6
Best Player: FS Kenny Payne, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... UL Monroe wins six games. This squad isn't as good as last year's team, and it's still a year away from big-time success, but it's good enough to beat Alcorn State and Florida Atlantic, and to come up with a few big home wins.

8. Florida Atlantic
Predicted record: 1-11 **Conf. record:** 0-7
Best Player: RB Dilvory Edgecomb, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... FAU wins four games. Forget about a win until October, but that's not to say the Owls can't pull off a few road wins in conference play and win a few home games to double last year's victory total of two.

WAC

CONFERENCE OUTLOOK

No league has a bigger chasm between the haves and have-nots. While that's lousy for WAC fans hoping for a fun season, it's great for a Boise State team dreaming to be a part of the BCS if it can beat Oregon State and Utah. Fresno State, Nevada and Hawaii are all good enough to play with anyone in the country for at least a half, and Louisiana Tech is decent, but then things drop off the map with San Jose State, Idaho (even with the addition of head coach Dennis Erickson), Utah State and New Mexico State among the worst teams in college football. More interesting than the WAC race will be the non-conference games with top teams facing Arizona State, Alabama, LSU, Oregon and Oregon State.

3 THINGS TO WATCH FOR

1. This will be the best Hawaii offense yet under June Jones. Davone Bess leads a loaded receiving corps that'll blow up with improved QB Colt Brennan.
2. Fresno State will go yet another year without winning a WAC title. 1999 is a long time ago.
3. Boise State will win games with defense, not offense.

GAME OF THE YEAR

Nov. 25 Boise State at Nevada

Excluding the bowl game last year in Boise, the last regular season home loss the Broncos suffered was in 2001 to Washington State. That's a span of 30 games, meaning it's doubtful anyone will beat Boise State on the blue turf. That means that if Nevada is as good as expected, this WAC finale could be for the title.

ALL-WAC OFFENSE

Offensive Player of the Year:
WR Davone Bess, Hawaii

He might not be huge at 5-10 and 187 pounds, but he's an elite playmaker with hands, precise route-running ability, and toughness. He's a sure thing go-to receiver who'll demand double coverage far more often than most defensive coordinators would like.

QB	Colt Brennan, Jr.	Hawaii
RB	Jayson Bird, Soph.	Idaho
RB	Robert Hubbard, Sr.	Nevada
WR	Davone Bess, Soph.	Hawaii
WR	Paul Williams, Sr.	Fresno State
TE	Anthony Pudewell, Sr.	Nevada
OL	Ryan Clady, Soph.	Boise State
OL	Tad Miller, Jr.	Boise State
OL	Barrett Reznick, Sr.	Nevada
OL	Samson Satele, Sr.	Hawaii
OL	Kyle Young, Sr.	Fresno State
PK	Mike Barrow, Sr.	Idaho
KR	Tony Pennyman, Sr.	Utah State

ALL-WAC DEFENSE

Defensive Player of the Year:
LB Korey Hall, Boise State

Being the best defensive player in the WAC is a bit like being the best episode of Arli$$, but Hall is a talented veteran in the middle of the defense with 283 career tackles and 21 tackles for loss. He's always around the ball and always in the right position.

DL	Ikaiaka Alama-Francis, Sr.	Hawaii
DL	Andrew Browning, Sr.	Boise State
DL	Louis Leonard, Sr.	Fresno State
DL	Melila Purcell, Sr.	Hawaii
LB	Dwayne Andrews, Sr.	Fresno State
LB	Colt Brooks, Sr.	Boise State
LB	Korey Hall, Sr.	Boise State
DB	Gerald Alexander, Sr.	Boise State
DB	Marcus McCauley, Jr.	Fresno State
DB	Marty Tadman, Jr.	Boise State
DB	Leonard Peters, Sr.	Hawaii
P	Mike Barrow, Sr.	Idaho
PR	Quinton Jones, Sr.	Boise State

Jared Zabransky — Andy Lyons/Getty

1. Boise State
Predicted record: 11-1 **Conf. record:** 8-0
Best Player: LB Korey Hall, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Boise State gets to the BCS. It'll take 11 wins with the one loss coming in a nail-biter, but the schedule is too light and the team is too loaded to shoot for anything less. Even if the formula doesn't end up working out and the Broncos don't go to one of the big games, a WAC title would be nothing to sneeze at.

T2. Hawaii
Predicted record: 9-4 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: WR Davone Bess, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... the Warriors go back to a bowl game. With this much firepower and the WAC schedule opening up the way it does after a brutal opening three games, a seven-win regular season is a must, and nine is possible.

T2. Nevada
Predicted record: 8-4 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: QB Jeff Rowe, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Nevada wins the WAC title. It won't be easy with road games at Fresno State, Hawaii and Louisiana Tech, but Boise State has to come to Reno, and the second half of the schedule is soft enough to make a run possible. After last year, anything less than a title would be a disappointment.

T2. Fresno State
Predicted record: 7-5 **Conf. record:** 6-2
Best Player: C Kyle Young, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Fresno State wins the WAC title. It has to be the goal for a program that hasn't gotten it done under head coach Pat Hill. Playing well against Oregon and LSU would be icing on the cake, but they need to finally get over the hump and become the outright best team in the league.

5. Louisiana Tech
Predicted record: 7-6 **Conf. record:** 5-3
Best Player: WR Eric Newman, Sr.
This season will be a success if ... Tech goes bowling. It'll have to survive seven road games in the first nine, but things soften up the rest of the way. The WAC title is out of the question.

6. Idaho
Predicted record: 3-9 **Conf. record:** 2-6
Best Player: RB Jayson Bird, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... Idaho wins at least four games and pulls off one good upset. Considering Idaho hasn't won more than three games since 2000, four wins would be a nice first step in the Dennis Erickson era.

T7. New Mexico State
Predicted record: 3-9 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: WR A.J. Harris, Soph.
This season will be a success if ... the Aggies win five games. The two D-IAA games have to be locks, and there has to be at least a split on the road against Idaho and Utah State. The home date with San Jose State also is a must-win, and they need one out-of-the-blue upset to make this happen.

T7. San Jose State
Predicted record: 2-10 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: RB Mat Cantu, Sr..
This season will be a success if ... the Spartans win six games. It'll take a few upsets and at least two roads wins, which is harder than it sounds for a program without an away victory since 2003.

T7. Utah State
Predicted record: 1-11 **Conf. record:** 1-7
Best Player: WR/PR Kevin Robinson, Jr.
This season will be a success if ... Utah State wins five games. Having not won five or more games in five years, it would be a good turnaround season to go into late November with an outside chance of pulling off six victories

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